

THE INVESTIGATIONS OF JOHN PYM.

I.—The Case of Muelvos y Sagra.



ERMIT me to say in the first instance who it is who constitutes himself John Pym's biographer. My name is Edward Venables, and at the time at which my first narrative opens I was a journalist of twenty-five years' standing. When I came to London, after some years of probation in the great towns of the provinces, my employers supposed themselves to detect in me a certain capacity for what is called descriptive writing. This resulted in my finding a passport to every sphere of society, and almost every form of life. I waited on the public functions of royalties in all parts of the world, and I explored the slums of many of the great cities of Europe and the States. I was on nodding acquaintance with twenty score of knaves—a polyglot crowd. Incessant outdoor work for twenty years of life on the staff of a great metropolitan journal had made me known to all sorts of people, and had made them known to me. I knew burglars and barristers, professional dog-stealers and bishops. I have lived in palaces and in hovels; in a purely professional capacity in both cases. I have seen two or three campaigns, and I know Tommy Atkins under seven or eight racial disguises. As well as I know anybody, I know the police of London and Paris.

At the time of which I now write, my friend John Pym gave little promise of becoming known to the world at large. I used to think him the most irritating man of my acquaintance, though he was for years my dearest friend. There was hardly a walk of life in

which he might not have achieved success, and he did practically nothing. He has the largest and most varied intellectual armoury of any man I know, but he spent all his time in furbishing his weapons and adding new ones with no apparent object. He studied by turns anatomy, medicine, chemistry, natural history, geology, botany, languages and literatures; amassing learning at a frightful rate, and doing nothing with it all. I am a man of action, and it has been the business of my life to lay before the public, piping hot, every new thing that I have learned and seen. To a man of my habits and my way of thinking, there was something scarcely tolerable in the spectacle of this astonishing savant grubbing and grinding among his books for ever, and leaving all the wide fields of his learning sterile and unused. When in the course of some one of our talks he would pour out on me some stream of hard-won fact and brilliant theory, I used to ask him impatiently what was the good of all his erudition whilst it lay unused. He used to



"Well," said the doctor, "what's the latest addition to that palatial lumber-room of useless knowledge?"

laugh and confess to an insatiable curiosity. Then he would announce a new study—had a six months' craze for hydraulics, or astronomy, or microscopy. It was enough for

him that he had discovered himself to be ignorant anywhere. He would not rest until he had patched that hole in his armour.

He came out of his books at last in a sufficiently astonishing manner.

Pym and I were one night seated in his

of utilitarians I ever met. Here you sit in the middle of a world which is crammed full of the most enticing and delightful problems. They call with the sweetest voices, they beckon with the most alluring airs, and you sit blind and deaf to their enchantments until somebody shows you how to turn the nimble ninepence by their aid. Then you're on your hind legs in a second, and swift in the race for knowledge."

"The man's just hopeless," said the doctor in his quiet Scottish way. "Just hopeless. But since that's your momentary line, Pym, I wish you'd do a little thing for me."

"Indeed!" said Pym, idly, "and what may that be?"

"I've a case just now," returned Macquarrie, "that worries the life out of me, or thereabouts. To tell ye the plain truth, I'm nine-tenths convinced of foul play in it. I'll not tell ye the names, but here are the circumstances. There's a lady patient o' mine, by birth a Spaniard. She's a charming woman, verging on the sixties. She has charge of a fine little fellow of about three years of age, a nephew of hers, son of a dead sister five and twenty years younger than herself. Now this child has suffered from symptoms that clean bother me. That he's suffering from some kind of irritant poison I haven't any manner o' doubt in the world, but what it is and how it was administered I'm completely at a

loss to guess. The symptoms are extraordinarily contradictory. There are signs of poisoning by strychnia, which have looked at moments unmistakable. Then the child has suffered from a maddening irritation of the skin, from hot sweats and cold sweats, tremblings, and a remarkable imitation of St. Vitus's dance. The latest symptom is the breaking out of a festering wound on the little wretch's foot. Three days ago there was no sign of that to my certain knowledge."

I asked Macquarrie what made him suspicious of foul play.

"A year ago," he answered, "the child's infant brother died with a partial manifestation of the same symptoms. At that time a certain person was staying in the house. He



"Pym sank back into his meditations."

rooms, when our old friend Dr. Macquarrie came in and joined in our talk.

"Well," said the doctor, "what's the latest addition to that palatial lumber-room of useless knowledge?"

Macquarrie was quite of my way of thinking about Pym's capacities, and the pity of his brilliant, useless life. Old Pym, who is an ugly man, with a nose like a crag and a brow like a cliff, has the sweetest smile I ever knew. It fairly transforms his face. He turned laughingly at the question.

"I'm invading your own special ground, Mac," he answered. "I've turned toxicologist."

"Have you, indeed?" said the doctor. "And what good is that going to do you?"

"How should I know?" Pym responded, good-humouredly. "I'll tell you what it is —you two. You're the most grovelling pair

is staying there now, or was until yesterday. He's a Spanish Brazilian, this fellow, and he's the uncle of my little sufferer. The child's an orphan, and is now sole heir to a very considerable estate. Should he die, this saffron-coloured scoundrel inherits in his stead."

"Does the child's aunt and guardian suspect this man?" asked Pym.

"That I know she does right well," the doctor answered. "And there's a part of the mystery! The fellow's so dreaded since his latest visit, and what we take for its result, that he has not been allowed a second's intercourse with the child. He has had no opportunity, so far as we can make out, of administering anything of a deleterious nature. There's nothing but suspicion in the former case, and nothing but suspicion in this. The fact is that this child is sick, and sick almost unto death of the very symptoms which killed his infant brother a year back when this man was in the house, and the mystery is, that the man has never been allowed near the victim. He has full motive for crime, for he is a gambler and hard-up, and if the child died he would immediately be wealthy."

"It's a queer business," said Pym. He rose up to knock the ashes from his pipe, and stood thoughtfully whilst he refilled and relit it. "The motive's clear enough," he said after a pause, "but the suspicion seems to rest on what may be a pure coincidence."

"The motive and coincidence together," cried Macquarie.

"Just so," said Pym, in a dull inward way, "just so."

He sat, nursing his foot after a way he had, and staring into the fire, and pulling mechanically at his pipe. He roused himself to ask a single question.

"Is the child out of danger?"

"I'm half disposed to hope so," Macquarie answered. "I shall know better tomorrow."

Pym sank back into his meditations, and gave such absent answers when we spoke to him that Macquarie and I left him to himself, and talked on indifferent topics for an hour. He began muttering to himself at last.

"Yes. A day would do it. An hour at West Kensington, two at the Museum, one at — Hillo! I beg your pardon. I'd forgotten

you two fellows completely. He gave himself a queer kind of shake and sat down bright and animated.

"This fellow's away, is he?" he asked; and then in answer to the doctor's puzzled look, "This Spanish Brazilian fellow. He's away?"

"Why, man," cried Macquarie, "we left him an hour ago. We've travelled half over the world since then."

"I didn't leave him," said Pym. "I've been thinking of nothing else. He's away?"

"Yes," the doctor answered. "He's away. He has some mercantile business in Southampton which he says will keep him a day or two. When the rascal left the child was supposed to be in extremis. Whether he's guilty or no, he'll be sorry to come back and find him well again, I know,



"I don't say I'm right, but I do say I may be."

though he was mightily moved with concern for the purir thing's welfare when he went away."

"You speak of the child's guardian as being a charming woman," said Pym. "Why does a charming woman admit into her house a

man whom she conceives to be capable of murder?"

"That's the pity of it," cried Macquarrie. "The house is not hers, but his. He is joint guardian with her, and she lives on his sufferance. He's away in the Brazils when he's at home, and this is his third visit to London for years past."

No more was said on this topic at the time, but when at a late hour Macquarrie rose to leave us, Pym asked him, with some little urgency, I fancied, to call on the following evening. I took my leave shortly afterwards and went upstairs to bed.



"We boarded a four-wheeler."

Pym and I were old chamber chums, but when he had taken to making all manner of horrible stenches with chemicals some four or five years before, I had left him to his devices, and had rented the suite of rooms over him.

I saw nothing of him next day, except for a chance glimpse of his face I caught as he passed me in a hansom in the neighbourhood of the Zoological Gardens. But at night, as I was sitting at work at my desk, I heard a dull battering just under my feet, and recognising a signal long in use between us, I descended to Pym's chambers.

"Here he is," said Pym, as I entered. "Now, Mac, if I wanted to go tiger-shooting, or if I ever got into a tight and desperate corner, this same old Ned Venables is the man I should like to have with me. He's as tough as wire, he's as cool as a cucumber,

he's as keen as a terrier, and there's nothing on the earth, or in the waters under it, that knows how to frighten him."

I feel a certain sense of immodesty in setting down this rhodomontade, and I feel that all the more keenly because I know how far it is from being true. I have been frightened pretty often in my time, and the only merit I claim in that regard is that I have never let anybody see it. I never knew but one man who really loved danger. I loathe it, but I have a reputation to consider.

"Now, Mac," Pym continued, "if I can persuade you to introduce me to this lady, you know enough of me by this time to be sure that your confidence in me will be utterly respected. I don't say I'm right, but I do say I may be.

The theory's so wild that I won't expose myself to any man's laughter by proclaiming it, until I've tried it."

"Well," said Macquarrie, "it's a serious matter, but with you and Venables here I can trust it. I do suspect the Brazilian rascal, and I do believe that if he comes back again he may make another trial. If you think

you can guess what fiend's trick he works by, I'll give you all the authority I've got—and it isn't much—to try.

The lady's name is Muriel, and she's in the Albert Road, Regent's Park. The Brazilian rascal's name is Muelvos y Sagra. Prefix Josef, and ye have'm in full. The child's greatly better, but I promised to take another look at'm to-night, and if ye're agreeable I'll introduce you to the lady at once."

"What is this all about?" I asked. "And why am I wanted?"

"Ned, old fellow," said Pym, laying both hands upon my shoulders, "do this one thing for me."

"My dear Jack," I answered, "if you put it in that way I'll do anything."

So I went off in contented ignorance. Whatever Pym's game was, it was blind man's buff to me. We boarded a four-wheeler, and we were driven to the street Macquarrie had named. Pym and I were left in the vehicle

whilst the doctor entered a decent-looking, retired little house, cosy, and with a feel of home about it, even when looked at from outside. I spoke once to Pym, but he returned no answer. Presently a servant came out and requested us to enter. We obeyed, and Macquarrie introduced us to a stately, sad-mannered lady, who had once been beautiful and was still venerably sweet, with her snow-white bands of hair, and her delicate brunette complexion, her fine arched eyebrows and large, short-sighted brown eyes. This was the Señora Murios. She received us in musical Spanish speech, expressing a hope that she was understood, and regretting that she had no English. Pym easily reassured her on that point, and for my own part I had had twelve months of that wretched, inactive Carlist war, and could get on well enough. I have scraped acquaintance with two or three languages in that way.

I need not detail the conversation, but it came to - this :—Pym

saw a possible solution to the mystery of the child's illness. He earnestly begged the lady's confidence, and he asked to be allowed to see the rooms respectively occupied by Señor Muelvos y Sagra and the child. The lady for her part assented, and at that moment there came a noisy summons at the street door.

"That is Josef," said Señora Murios, rising to her feet, and clasping her hands with a look of abject terror. "What shall I do? What shall I say?"

"These gentlemen are friends of yours," said Macquarrie, "and known to you through me. There is no cause for alarm, believe me."

The Señora was right in her recognition of Señor Josef's knock. I don't think I should have liked the swarthy man, even if I had not come prepared to dislike and suspect him, and yet he was not altogether an ill-looking fellow. He was scrupulously dressed, though he had just come off a journey, and he wore a gold-rimmed pincenez, perched delicately on

the bridge of his thin nose. His fine arched eyebrows were black as jet, but his close-cropped hair and his dandy little moustache and imperial were almost white. There was a spurious look of good breeding about the man, to which his tall and slender figure added some effect. His eyes were a good deal too close together for my liking, and if ever I saw pitiless and greedy "Self" written on a human face I saw it on his, as he stood bowing from right to left in the act of drawing off his gloves from his lean, long-fingered hands. It was easy to see that whatever else he was, the fellow was no fool. He had a fine though narrow dome of head, and his whole face was ex-



"Clasping her hands, with a look of abject terror."

pressive of intelligence—a malignant intelligence—a snake's deified.

Macquarrie accepted the situation created by this gentleman's arrival with a suave coolness which excited my admiration.

"You will be delighted, sir, to learn that your little charge is out of danger."

"Delighted," said Señor Josef, smiling and bowing, but I saw him bite his underlip. "That is indeed good news."

"These gentlemen," pursued Macquarrie, "are Englishmen of eminence, whom I have taken the liberty to introduce to the Señora Murios. They have the advantage of speaking Spanish, which is not a common pleasure among my countrymen."

The Señor bowed and shook hands with both of us. He was enchanted to make our acquaintance. He regretted infinitely that it was absolutely necessary that he should tear himself away. He had brought home his baggage, but he had to keep an appointment at a little distance only. He bade us good-night with sorrow, and trusted that he would

have the pleasure of seeing us again. And so he bowed himself out, smiling and protesting, and all the while, as was to be seen plainly enough, wondering who we two strangers were, and casting suspicious guesses here and there as to the meaning of our presence.

We stood in silence when he had left us, and heard the sharp click of his heels upon the pavement as he walked away.

"Oh!" whispered Señora Murios, in a frightened voice, to Pym, "if he knew why you were here, sir, he would kill me. He is not a man to be watched or spied upon."

Pym begged to see the rooms at once, and for a second time she assented. But she led the way tremulously, and at Pym's request I followed. Our frightened guide led us,

"He was scrupulously dressed."

to begin with, to a bedroom on the first floor. It was a chamber of the most ordinary type, plainly and even rather meagrely furnished. The only thing in any degree unusual about it was that in place of the common plaster and wall-paper it was lined with plain stained deal. The ceiling was of the same construction, a fact I might not have noticed if I had not observed that Pym scrutinised it with the closest attention.

"The child's bed stood here?" he asked after a time.

"Yes," the lady answered. "The child's bed stood there. Since his seizure it has been taken to my own room."

"Thank you," said Pym, gravely. "There is nothing further to look for here."

Our guide moved towards the door, but stopped with a face of terror at the noise of cab wheels in the street outside. The sound went by, and she led the way again.



"This," she said, opening a door on the next landing, "is the bedroom of the child's uncle."

We entered after her, and I looked about me again, discerning nothing uncommon in the aspect or arrangement of the room. The bed was old-fashioned and heavy, and between its foot and the projecting bulk of a heavy mahogany wardrobe there was but just sufficient space to allow of the wardrobe door being opened. Pym went straight to this antique piece of furniture and looked into its shadowed recess. It seemed at first sight to be quite empty.

"The candle, madame, if you please," said Pym. He took the light and knelt upon the floor, with his head and shoulders projected in the wardrobe. By-and-by an odd little gasp escaped him, and he withdrew his head. His face at that instant was fully illumined, and I saw that he was ghastly pale, and that his eyes were blazing with some inward fire. He rose from his knees, and reaching his left hand towards me, held out a small clay flower-pot somewhat larger than a common tumbler. I did not understand his agitation or guess at the meaning of his discovery, but there was no mistaking the fact that he was at once shaken and triumphant. At a gesture from him I took the candle in my unoccupied hand, and he drew from the flower-pot a tangle of thin whip-cord, at the end of which was fastened a little arrangement in rusted wire. Pym examined this with a prolonged intentness, which gave me time to scrutinise it also. It was made of two pieces of wire, each perhaps six inches in length. Each piece was doubled in the centre. The centre ends then ran together for an inch, when they diverged, and each of the further ends formed a hook. The two pieces were fastened together firmly at the bend by a smaller piece of wire, which had been bound about them by the aid of a pair of pliers. Below this was a little wire circle, which could be used to bring the four curves closer to each other.

"That will do," said Pym at last, replacing the worthless-looking tangle pretty much as he had found it. A little rough sand fell from the flower-pot as he did this, and falling on his knees, he scrupulously removed it from the carpet grain by grain. Then he replaced the flower-pot in the wardrobe, and rising to his feet, closed the door, and handed the candlestick to Señora Murios in silence.

"What is it?" she asked, whisperingly, with an added terror in her eyes. "You have found something?"

"Everything, I think," said Pym. "I shall have more to say downstairs."

She looked at him wonderingly, but he stood without regarding her, his face still pale, his clean-shaven lips compressed in a hard, straight line, and his eyes veritably blazing. I, who had known him so closely for so many years, had no hint of a doubt about him in my mind, wholly in the dark as I was. He was always a daring theorist, but he treated theory as theory, and was, like all fine thinkers, slow to proclaim certainty.

When we reached the lower room, Macquarie started and stared at him, his face was so transfigured. Señora Murios stood, with the unextinguished candle in her hand, waiting with a piteous look of bewilderment and fear. Pym planted himself squarely on the hearthrug, facing us all.

"I have little doubt, madame," he said, in the slow and precise way in which a man speaks a language which is not often on his tongue, "that Josef Muelvos y Sagra is once a murderer in fact and twice a murderer in intent. I say this with a complete sense of the gravity of the statement. I believe myself to understand the diabolical means by which he has worked, and I trust to take him red-handed in a last attempt. But to succeed, I must have nothing less than your full trust and confidence."

She looked from Pym to Macquarie, from Macquarie to me, and back again to Pym.

"You are an English gentleman," she said, after a painfully undecided pause. "Dr. Macquarie is almost my only English friend. He tells me you are all-accomplished, and good and upright. I will take his word."

"Thank you," said Pym. "Tell me," he continued, still speaking in Spanish, but addressing himself to Macquarie, "when do you think the child might be safely trusted to sleep in his own room again alone?"

"Impossible to say," the doctor answered.

"We must wait then," said Pym. "But when that time comes, Señora Murios, I shall ask you to trust me. In the meantime, I should advise the child's removal from this house at the earliest safe hour. Other means than those I suspect may be employed against him."

"What means do you suspect?" she asked, panting in her speech.

"Pardon me if I even seem to add to your suspense," said Pym, gravely. "I have reason for it. I have only to ask you for one promise. When the time arrives, will you permit this gentleman and myself to watch over your charge for that one night? We shall ask to have the door locked and to be in darkness."

She gazed at us all three in turn with her pathetic, troubled, and short-sighted look, but she finally assented by a mere inclination of the head.

"The next matter is entirely at your discretion, but I should be happier to know that for that one night you would be willing to absent yourself from the house."

Old Pym's ugly face was hand-



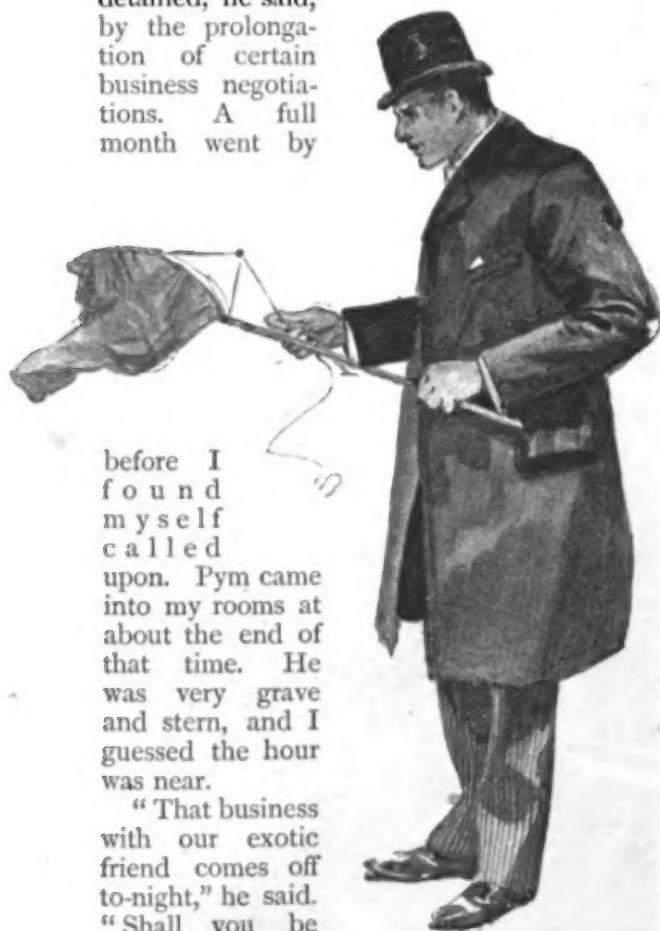
"He took the light, and knelt upon the floor."

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His stur-
dy figure

and his manly, quiet voice spoke honesty. The Señora held out her hand to him with a sudden impulse.

"I trust you," she said. "I trust you altogether."

We left upon this understanding, and Pym kept his secret to himself. The days went by, and I had from him or from the doctor occasional news of the child. He was recovering fast, but was suffering from a form of eczema, hearing which Pym merely nodded with "Just so, just so." The Spanish Brazilian was still in London, unexpectedly detained, he said, by the prolongation of certain business negotiations. A full month went by



"He had fixed a string arrangement."

"That business with our exotic friend comes off to-night," he said. "Shall you be ready?" I was keen-set with curiosity and answered "Yes" at once. "All right," said Pym. "Come down to me at eight o'clock."

He went away without another word, and left me on the tenter-hooks, feeling as if a big battle were announced for next morning. I ought to know *that* sensation.

Eight o'clock came, and down I went to Pym's rooms. He was already dressed for out of doors, and when I entered he was toying with a small, short-handled butterfly net. He had fixed a string arrangement by which he could close the mouth of the net at a jerk, and he was testing this with an intentness which seemed absurdly trivial under the circumstances. But when he had fairly

satisfied himself as to its smooth working, he folded it up and stowed it away under the light dust coat he wore. I concluded that he had a use for it, and forbore to question him. He armed himself further with a dark lantern, and then announced his readiness to start.

We found a hansom waiting, and the driver, evidently instructed beforehand, set off at a brisk pace. It was a clouded night, and cold, with a touch of wet mist in the air. The hansom set us down at a public-house, and Pym led the way in. He walked through the bar and into a snugger behind it.

"We may have to wait here for a little while," he said. We sat silent and alone for perhaps half an hour, and then the potman came in with a note. Pym read it and put it in his pocket. "The coast is clear," he said calmly. "We can go now."

The mist had thickened to a drizzle, and the night had grown bleak and windy, but we were within five minutes' distance of the house we sought. When we reached it, we found the street door already open and the Señora awaiting us. She was so terribly agitated that she could scarcely speak, but she made us understand that she was supposed to be absent from the house, and had made arrangements to spend the night away from it. Señor Muelvos y Sagra had made a pretence of being out of town, but he had returned that evening, bringing with him a large black despatch box, which he had himself carried to his own room.

"That will do," said Pym. "You will act most wisely by showing us to the child's room at once, and leaving the house immediately. Your servants know that you are here?"

"I have but one," the unhappy lady answered, "but I could trust her with my soul."

A minute later we were in the lower bedroom, in the dark. Two chairs had been placed for us near the window. Pym turned the key in the lock, and then withdrew it. We heard the opening and closing of the street door, and a retreating step in the passage below. The solitary domestic had retired.

Pym had fired the wick of his dark lantern before leaving the hall, and he now set it on the floor at his feet. I could see just a dim glow-worm sort of light shining in the ventilator at top, but that was all. We sat as still as a pair of ghosts, and could hear each other's breathing and the ticking of our own and each other's watches. The time went on with incredible slowness, but my eyes had

grown accustomed to the darkness, which was faintly illuminated by the street lamps outside, and I could make out everything in the chamber in a dim and shadowy way. Cabs went by with roar and clatter, footsteps passed the house, and voices, and the time dragged along. A clock at some distance struck the quarters with an interminable stretch betwixt each and each.

It was near midnight when a rapid but light footstep came along the street, and paused below. The rattle of a latch-key sounded in the lock, faintly, and the door was stealthily opened and as stealthily closed. Then a step came creaking up the stair, and paused outside our room. A cautious hand tried the door. We heard the sputter of a match, and a light gleamed through the keyhole.

Then the footsteps went murderously stealing upstairs, and by-and-by we heard them creaking overhead. I put my heart into my ears and listened. There was a faint noise of hollow iron; then a snap as of a key in a lock, then a pause, then footsteps again, then the creak of a door, and then a faint rasp upon the floor above, as if one dry substance slid upon another. Pym's hand

touched mine, and it was like fire. I turned silently to look at him, and in the dimness saw him beckon upwards. I looked, and there, right above the child's cot, was a square of faint light, and whilst I was wondering what this might mean, something dropped through it and came slowly down. The thing was living. It had a body shaped like two eggs, a lesser and a larger, and a number of limbs that writhed at the air as if they sought to grasp something. Then I knew the meaning of Pym's butterfly net. He rose without a sound, and waited for the hideous thing to descend with the net open below it. It came down writhing into the waiting net, there was a faint clicking noise, and Pym with a loud voice cried :

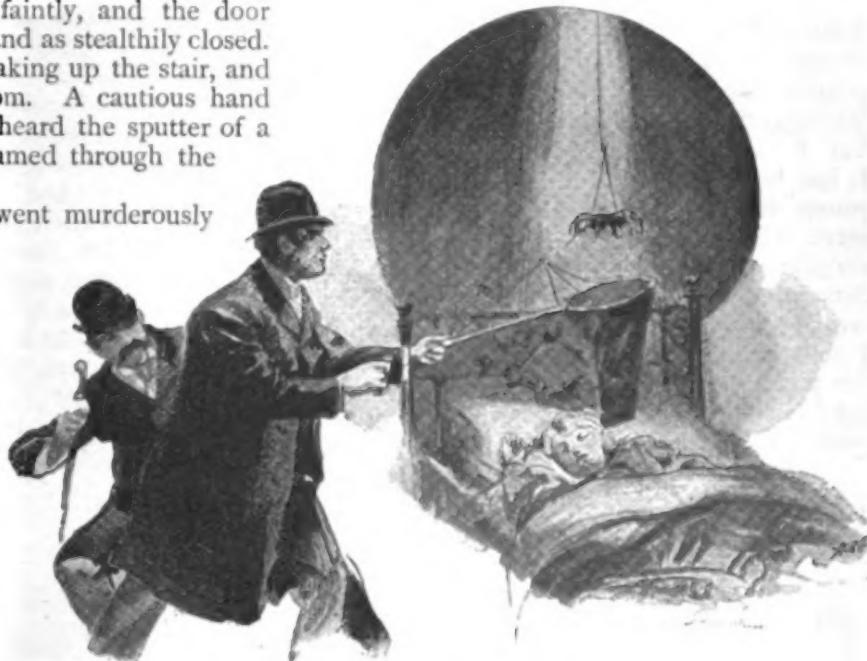
"The lantern! Quick! I have it!"

Before I could snatch the lantern from the floor, the ceiling was shaken as if by a heavy fall.

"Now," said Pym, "let us have a look at

you." I flashed the lantern, and there on the floor, struggling in the butterfly net, was a gigantic spider, covered with coarse, reddish grey hair. "Take this," said Pym, thrusting something into my hand. I felt at once that it was a revolver. "If that scoundrel tries to get downstairs, stop him."

I rushed for the door, forgetting in my excitement that it was locked, and tugged at it until Pym followed with the key. The child was awake, and screamed in an agony of



"Waited for the hideous thing to descend."

terror. Pym threw open the window, and blew a policeman's whistle again and again. I stood guarding the stair. Feet came running, and a voice called out to know what was the matter.

"Attempted murder!" Pym's voice answered. "Wait there till I let you in."

Four of us went upstairs, two policemen lantern in hand, and we two spectators of that awful crime. I tried the door, and found it locked. I called, but no answer came. I made a rush and burst it open with one flat-footed thrust, and at that instant a shot sounded.

When we entered, we found that Josef Muelvos y Sagra had gone to his account.

On the bed stood a large despatch box, which opened both at the lid and at the front. It had a false bottom, on which was distributed, to the depth of five or six inches, a coarse grey sand, which had not long ago been sprinkled with water. Below the false bottom

burned a spirit lamp. In one corner of the sanded space lay a flower-pot of the size and shape I knew already. Within it was the dead and shrunken body of a mouse.

By this time the quaking domestic was doing her best to soothe the frightened child.

Pym brought up his captive, and delivered a brief lecture to the bewildered officers.

"This, gentlemen, is the largest and most formidable of the Mygalidae. It is commonly known as the great South American Hairy Spider. It is exceedingly fierce and venomous, though its powers of offence have been greatly exaggerated by the ignorant. Its bite has often been reported as fatal to adults, but I have met with no authentic record. It has been frequently known to be fatal to young children. When irritated, as you observe it is at present by the pressure of this contrivance of wire, it becomes additionally dangerous. It demands a high temperature, and an air not too devoid of moisture. I shall ask you to observe, gentlemen, that this wardrobe has no bottom, and that a hole has been cut through the floor of this apartment. Remark further, that the bed of the

child whose life was attempted lies directly below the orifice."

He detached the handle of the net and dropped the dreadful thing, net and all, into the despatch box, blew out the spirit lamp, and locked up the struggling insect.

We left one officer to guard the body of the suicide-murderer, and we accompanied the other to the local police office, where Pym told his story. When at the close of this wild night we found ourselves at home again, I gave a loose rein to my astonishment.

"Well," said Pym simply, "I know no other poison which could produce all the effects that Mac detailed. Then came in that symptom of maddening irritation of the skin. Those short reddish grey hairs come off at a touch and produce precisely that effect. It is that fact which has led to the superstitious belief that mere contact with this insect is fatal. Then the villain himself came from Brazil, which is the home of this particular beast. I was less puzzled to diagnose the case than to work out the means by which the crime might be committed."

And there is the unvarnished history of John Pym's first criminal investigation.



"Josef Muelvos y Sagra had gone to his account."

THE INVESTIGATIONS OF JOHN PYM.

II.—The Sacred Sapphire.



MAKE no apology for diverging from strict chronological order in my narration of Pym's more striking and curious adventures. My only aim in the mere arrangement of these narratives is variety. I choose to tell the history of the Sacred Sapphire here, because it is wholly unlike the story which preceded it and the story which will follow it.

I shall have to tell the story of the Rouble Notes by-and-by, for though the case in its general outlines is in everybody's memory, Pym and I were the only people who knew its inward aspects. The sleepless anxiety that case gave him, the lidless, dragon-eyed watch he was forced to keep, and the dreadful atmosphere of danger he lived in, had fairly worn him out, and Macquarie put his foot down firmly, and declared that Pym must rest, and should rest.

"Rest," said Macquarie. "Rest, and plenty of it, or I won't be answerable for the consequences."



"In an attitude of complete languor."

"That's all very well," said Pym, with a feeble petulance which showed how changed he was. "But how am I to set about it? I suppose that it, like other things, wants practice. I've never rested in my life. I'm not to read, and not to write, and not to

think, and not to smoke, and not to exert myself! Then what *am* I to do, and how am I to set about it?"

"Take a long sea-voyage," said Mac, "and leave your books behind you."

"Ugh!" said Pym, with a shiver of disgust. He was lying all abroad on his sofa, in an attitude of complete languor. The empty pipe he held in his drooping right hand trailed on the floor. His face was of the colour of stale unbaked bread, his voice was thin and querulous, and his eyes, deep sunken as they were, looked a size or two too big for his face. "I should die of ennui in a week," said Pym.

At this very instant, as dramatically appropriate in action as things are on the stage, my man presented himself with a note from my journalistic chief.

"DEAR VENABLES,—Be ready to start at once for Peshawur. Delimitation of Frontier question growing acute. Full instructions, and personal letter of introduction from First Lord of the Admiralty to British political agent follow in three hours."

I had scarcely read this when Pym struggled to his feet.

"I'll go with you," said he.

"Mai dearr mahn!" sings out old Mac, twice as Scotch as usual.

"I'm going," said Pym. "That is, if Venables will have me."

"My dear boy," said I, "if Mac will let you go, I shall be delighted. Fight it out together. I must go and pack. The journey to Bombay won't hurt him,

Mac, and unless he's better when we get there I won't let him go roughing it up north."

"I'll not listen for a moment," cried the doctor, "to any such proposition o' folly as a journey overland to Brindisi or Naples.

Ye've called me in as your medical man, and I forbid it."

"Very well," said Pym. "I'll follow him by steamer. I shall have an object before me at least, and without some end in view I won't travel."

As a matter of fact, with that incubus of doing nothing thrown off his shoulders, he



"I knew him at a word."

was another man already. I went upstairs about my own business, and having finished my packing, received final and full instructions, and was whirled out of London by the Charing Cross express that same evening. In the same hour Pym was away to Plymouth from Paddington, and we said our good-byes at our own door.

I caught my boat at Naples, and got there a three days' old telegram from Pym to say that he was on my track. The journey was made with no particular incident of importance, except that we grounded in the Suez, and blocked the canal for a day. But when I reached Bombay I found another telegram, from my chief this time, "Wait instructions." I learned that the Foreign Office in London had come to a momentary understanding with Russia. There was a proposal for the construction of a "scientific frontier." I waited a week, and three days before I had to start again came Pym, as brown as a berry and as fit as a fiddle. According to his own account, he had done nothing but eat and sleep and lounge, but I met a fellow-passenger

of his who told me he had kept the whole ship alive. Anyhow, here he was, ready for anything, and when at last the diplomatic relations grew strained again, we went up country together.

When we reached our destination, we lived for awhile in daily expectation of a big thing for a week or two, but nothing came of our hopes. We had got up there in the hot season, and what with the temperature, and the flies, and the mosquitoes, and the nameless and shameless discomforts of life in the orient, and with having nothing to do, we got to be altogether restless and dispirited. But as luck would have it, as we were wandering about in the comparatively cool shade of the great bazaar pricing things, and buying now and then, and languidly watching the movements of life about us—stale and familiar to me

this last score of years—I felt a hand clawing at my shoulder, and there, when I turned, was my old friend Dewar.

It is an old story now, and Captain the Hon. Frederic Dewar has gone into that narrow little territory which is the injured man's last refuge from the scandal of the world. He got into an awful mess at home; he took what in Scotland we call "a scunner" at the world, and he had hidden himself in North-western India, and was living native fashion half-way between Peshawur and Cabul. I knew him at a word, in spite of his native get-up, his bronzed face, and his great beard, and I was heartily glad to shake hands with him once more. Naturally, he asked my business, and I told him.

"Nothing will come of that," he said, "but in any case I can tell you more than your diplomatic people. I get a weekly consignment of European newspapers, and your ignorance over there makes me laugh very often. Come and spend a week or two with me. You'll lose nothing in any case, and if anything is happening I can let you know."

I told him I was accompanied by a friend,

and in a breath he included him in the invitation. When I introduced Pym and Dewar to each other, the Anglo-Indian's start of surprise was ludicrous.

"Is this *the*—?" He paused.

"This is *the* John Pym," I answered.
"All imitations are fraudulent."

"Where are you staying?" asked Dewar. "Take me home with you. I think," he whispered, "I can find Mr. Pym something to do that may be worth his while." We were living not far away, and in ten minutes' time he opened up his story. "Did you ever hear, Mr. Pym, of the sacred sapphire of Shirkapur?"

"Never," said Pym. He was trying to light one of those bundles of unspeakable tobacco which pass as cigars in that region.

"It has had a curious history," said Dewar, "a very curious history. The sapphire is not the most valuable of gems as a rule, and,

financial flea-bite. But the great sacred sapphire of Shirkapur is unique, and, as a mere plain matter of fact, is beyond valuation. It measures, as near as need be, three inches by two by two. It is absolutely flawless and of the finest colour. There is no other precious stone in the world which has one quarter of its weight. It is cut in a pure oblong, and has six faces only, but in the front face of it is engraved a word which has never been deciphered or translated. The story is that more than four thousand years ago it was found beneath the foundation of one of the great columns of a temple portico at Kandy. The legend tells that beneath the sister column there was found an emerald of equal size. The temple was a ruin, and no man knew for what purpose it had been erected. By what adventures the great sacred sapphire reached Shirkapur nobody knows, but for thousands of years it was treasured



"It was stolen less than half-a-year after my first sight of it."

so far as I can learn, the largest and purest known has never realised more than six or seven thousand pounds. That, in comparison with the diamond, is, of course, the merest

there. Long and long ago—somewhere about the time of our own Alfred the Great—it was stolen. Since then it has passed through numberless hands—it has been the

cause of a score of tribal wars, and of private crimes beyond counting. Two years ago it fell into my possession."

"Into yours?" I cried.

"Into mine," he answered. "It belonged to a Mahometan Hodja, Ibrahim El Din, a native of Khartoum, who had made a life-long pious pilgrimage to all the great shrines of his faith throughout India. This man was murderously assaulted at the very gate of my house. I rescued him from his assailants—

some evil deity, who was given over to eternal condemnation by Allah. It had been a curse to the faithful ever since it had been in their hands. The man believed that with its transfer to the possession of an infidel the curse would pass away. He died, and was buried by his own people, and I became the owner of the supreme jewel of the world."

"And what became of it?" I asked.

"It was stolen less than half a year after my first sight of it," Dewar answered. "I am persuaded that I know the thief. He is none other than my nearest neighbour, and is, I strongly suspect, one of the assassins who made an end of Ibrahim El Din. Every nook and cranny of his house has been searched, again and again, and the man himself has been waylaid, but we have found no sign of the sapphire. To me the gem is an intensely valuable curio, and no more, but I would give two thousand pounds for its recovery. I should never dream of cutting it, and to put it on the market as it exists would be a hopeless enterprise. There is no government which would pay its price, and no private citizen in the world would buy it."



"He carried a pair of powerful field glasses, and as he ran I could see him struggling to disengage them."

there were but two of them—and I carried him indoors. He lingered for nearly three weeks, and at the end of that time he died. Two days before his death he gave me the jewel, which he carried in a small steel casket round his neck, attached to a steel chain. This," pursued Dewar, "is the key of the casket. You can see that it is of very ancient workmanship. You will ask, naturally, why such a treasure was given into the hands of a stranger and an unbeliever. The Hodja Ibrahim El Din's reason was clear enough to his own mind. For generations every owner of this gem had come to a violent death because of it, and he believed that the temple under whose foundations it was discovered had been erected to the worship of

I confess that I had my doubts about this story. More than once in the course of its telling it flashed across me that Dewar might be mad, and that the whole business was no more and no less than a wild hallucination. He *looked* sane enough, to be sure, and he told his tale in the simplest and most straightforward fashion, and when I came to cross-examine him, as I did, and pretty closely, too, he answered without the faintest hesitation. If he had no more than a mad dream in his mind, he certainly had a dream of more than common coherence and lucidity.

Our talk ended in a promise that we would visit him, and on that understanding he went away.

"Well, Pym," I asked, when we two were

left alone again, "what do you think of this? Is it fact or fancy? Is it an astonishing bit of genuine romance, or is it a touch of phrenzy?"

"Don't know, I'm sure," said Pym. "We shall know more in a week's time, I daresay."

I couldn't help thinking that he rather doubted, all the same, and I know that for my own part I watched Dewar for the next few days to find in him some touch of mental eccentricity which might justify my half-belief that his history was a figment of his own brain. All I noticed was a not very remarkable tendency to exaggeration. He "talked large," but then so many people who reckon themselves to be conspicuously truthful do that. He had made journeys on foot and on horseback which seemed a trifle improbable to my fancy. He had had hunting adventures which, to say the least of them, were remarkable. I had always known him as a modest, quiet fellow, and I thought that perhaps the natural exuberance of spirit which might arise on meeting an old friend after so long an exile from the world might account for some touch of change in him. This I am sure of—if that astonishing yarn of his had not re-opened our acquaintance with each other, I should have needed only the tiniest grain of salt to relish anything he said to reason's palate. As it was, I watched and suspected, and found very little come of watchfulness and suspicion. The poor old chap was overflowing with animal spirits, and with the delight of converse in his native tongue, and he was just a trifle exuberant. That was all.

When we reached his place at last, we found that he was living in the style of a native of some rank. He had a disorderly mob of servants, and a rambling, low-roofed, ramshackle old palace of a house one third gone to ruins. The residence stood in a biggish compound, a hundred yards back from the straggling village street, and the compound was hemmed in by high mud walls. The country was hilly, but fairly well-off for vegetation, and every here and there were deep dry nullahs, which were evidently strong water-courses in the rainy season.

Outside Dewar's gates ran the crooked village road, and just opposite was a small building of one storey standing flush on the street. This, according to Dewar's statement, was the home of the man who had stolen the sacred sapphire. The name of this person was Boba Jow Rhi, and he was an alien to that part of India. He was a fat, swarthy fellow, not by any means ill-looking, and he seemed to spend most of his time on pony-back scouring the hilly roads. He was out twice a day, in the morning and the evening cool, and Pym and I jogging about the country at the same hours remarked him pretty often.

"Not many Orientals are as active as that fellow," Pym said to me one day. "He rides to keep his fat down, evidently."

Twice every day Boba Jow Rhi took the same constitutional course, and every now and then Pym and I would encounter him on the hill roads by accident. Once we overtook him, and Pym fell into talk, for as



it turned out the man had long been a resident in Kashmere, and spoke decent Persian. Persian was one of Pym's many tongues, and he was delighted to get a little vocal practice in it. Jow Rhi seemed not to be in the least shy or reticent, and they chattered away together in a surprisingly amicable way for five or ten minutes. At the end of the talk Jow Rhi made his excuses apparently, and clattered off home. He had no sooner turned the corner and got out of sight than Pym whipped off his pony, and throwing me the rein, set away at a run uphill.



"Grinning down at me like a Japanese Idol."

He carried a pair of powerful field-glasses, and as he ran I could see him struggling to disengage these from the battered old leather case in which he carried them. In a very little while he too disappeared from sight, and I was left to my own speculations. In the dry stillness of the morning air I could hear the *plunkety-plunk, plunkety-plunk* of the retreating pony's hoof-beats on the hard road at a considerable distance. By-and-by the sound ceased suddenly, and after a pause of not more than half a minute at the outside, it

went on again, and gradually faded away into nothing. I listened to the decreasing noise quite mechanically, and just as my ear failed to discern it longer, Pym came plunging with great strides downhill, and rejoined me. I questioned him, of course, but all I got out of him was a shake of the head and a self-satisfied "Not yet, old man."

I suppose I may confess to a little bit of human nature on my own side. My name has been known beyond my own doorstep for a good many years now, and for a longish time I had been in the habit of bullying Pym in a friendly sort of way, and from my own standpoint of man of the world, I daresay I had patronised him pretty often. And now, from the moment when he had become known as the solver of the puzzle offered by that scoundrel, Josef y Sagra, he had gone on mounting in fame and public estimation like a rocket. I had been left far and far behind, and, the plain English is that Pym had rather taken to patronising *me!* I thought that "Not yet, old man," a great deal too superior in manner. I formed a resolve on the instant. I would have a little practical joke out of this affair. I would ask no more questions, and would perplex myself with no problems. I would watch Pym. I would detect the detective. And when he was ready with his discovery—if he should come to one—I would have the pleasure of forestalling him. Perhaps that doesn't show me in a very handsome light; but in any case I meant no more by it than to gratify a little harmless vanity on my side, and check a little harmless vanity in Pym.

Pym stopped riding, and wanted me to go out alone. I assented, and Pym took to wandering afoot with a geologist's hammer and a leather satchel. Of course he went out in the cool of the morning and late in the afternoon, and, of course, I watched him. His wanderings, however devious they might be, always brought him to one place, and that was the spot from which he had first watched Jow Rhi through his field-glasses. Half a dozen times, morning and evening, Jow Rhi came cantering along the hillside road, saluting me in passing, and I came to notice that every time he slackened speed and stopped at a certain point, as near as I could guess by listening, and then went on again.

When I thought myself able to strike a tolerably close average of the distance at which Jow Rhi halted, I changed my tactics and hid in a thicket not far away from the place of his usual pause. It was getting on

towards sunset, and looking eastward from my hiding-place just as I caught the first sound of hoof-beats, I saw from a belt of wood on a distant hill a flash of light. I laughed to think that Pym's field-glasses were at work, that I was nearer than he was to the scene of interest, whatever that might be, and that I was out of his line of observation.

Jow Rhi came cantering easily along until he was just on a level with my hiding-place. He pulled up not more than a hundred yards away from me, and sate stock still in the saddle, staring at the ground, I thought, though for aught I could see his eyes might have been closed. He stayed there a minute or a minute and a half, and then rode on again.

I lay low and waited. Some quarter of an hour later Pym came along. He stopped at the spot at which Jow Rhi had arrested his pony, and began to mouch around the place with evident painstaking. At last he fell upon his hands and knees, and remained in that posture for quite a considerable time. Finally he arose, dusted the knees of his trousers, and walked leisurely away. When I had given him law enough, I came down from my concealment and examined the spot to which Pym had devoted so close an attention.

I knew afterwards what I ought to have seen, and when I knew I could see it easily enough, but as a matter of fact I went away as much in the dark as I came. But I can hardly express the disgust I felt when, on rounding the first big rock on the road, I found Pym sitting in the topmost cleft of it, grinning down at me like a Japanese idol.

"You've done no harm this time, as it happens," he said, as he climbed down into the road, "but don't meddle again, old fellow. I want you to notice that the flat roof of our friend Jow Rhi's house is just visible from that spot. Our friend spends a good deal of his time on the house-top."

I walked on a little crestfallen, conscious that I was ministering to that absurd vanity of Pym's, whilst what I had wanted to do

was to minister to my own. One's own foible never *does* look as ridiculous as another man's.

Pym gave me no more chance to spy upon him out of doors, and I should really have been too angry and humiliated to have done it, even if he had offered me the opportunity. I could not avoid taking some interest in his proceedings all the same, and we were naturally thrown a good deal together. The very next morning I heard the sound of a saw in his bedroom, which was next to mine, and when I entered his chamber I found him hard at work with a plank of teak, a measuring tape, and a native saw. He had ready to



"An old, half-naked dervish holding out his bowl, and Jow Rhi himself pouring something into it."

his hand a nail-poiser, a screw-driver, and a handful of screws, and he was singing away in that harsh and untuneful voice of his, as merry as a magpie.

"What's the game now?" I asked him.

"More theories," said Pym, cocking a mischievous eye at me.

I watched him for an hour and more, and saw him make a box of one inch teak plank-ing, the six sides of it all screwed together tightly. Then I watched him whilst he tied this box strongly with thin cord, fold on fold. The box was simply a hollow cube, and had no lid.

"You seem to be tying up nothing with unusual care," said I.

"Yes," he answered. "I might have spared myself an hour's tedium if I had been left alone."

That was enough, I thought, and I walked out of the room, and having nothing better to do, strolled round to the stables, and tried to patch my knowledge of the local dialect by listening to the talk of the grooms. By-and-by comes Pym, and after two or three minutes' talk marches off with a sieve full of dried pulse.

"Turning hermit, Pym?" I said, as he passed me. "That's hermit's diet."

"Yes," he said, "it's hermit's diet, but I'm only a hermit for an hour. I'm in the mood for a scamper if you are."

Anything like a quarrel, or even a continued coldness between us, was impossible, but to be quite candid, Pym got to look so happy and radiant and amused over something which was in his own mind that I was angry with him over and over again.

One day I caught him on the roof under the big wet awning, which was leaking coolly down on to the cemented space beneath its shadow. He was lying full length in an easy chair, and was chuckling to himself in an intense enjoyment. The compound was empty, but away over at Jow Rhi's house there was an old, half-naked dervish holding out his bowl, and Jow Rhi himself was pouring something into it.

"Now that," said Pym, "is the biggest lark I ever saw."

He was obviously inspired by mirth, and I was puzzled to see what on earth he had to laugh at. I said so, rather snappishly. I was thoroughly bored for one thing, and for another I was suffering from top to toe with prickly heat, which is the most trying of all maladies to the temper.

"Let me enjoy myself, Ned," said Pym, with his disarming smile. "I don't often get the chance. And really, I have a joke in front of me, and if you'll let me have it to myself for another week or two, I'll share it with you."

"All right," said I, and sat down gingerly and smoked. The dervish saluted Jow Rhi and Jow Rhi salaamed to the dervish, and

then the half-naked brute slunk away along the hill road with his spear-topped staff in one hand and his bowl in the other. Pym laughed immoderately whilst I grunted scorn at him.

Every day for a fortnight at least the dervish called at Jow Rhi's place and had his gourd filled, and on every occasion Pym sat on the roof under the cool, dripping awning and laughed absurdly. My attack of prickly heat was over, but the itch of mental curiosity was even less bearable. But Pym would not part with his joke, and I grew too proud and piqued to ask him for it.

Another mystery, as vexatious as the rest, lay in the fact that the dervish planted himself with staff and bowl and water-gourd on the very spot which Pym and I had each so curiously examined. He sate there every day and all day, ready to hold out his calabash to every passer-by. Passers-by were rare, and he might have found a more profitable pitch almost anywhere.

I travelled, as I have travelled for years, with a collapsible indian-rubber bath, and it was the custom for Pym, who was unprovided in that way, to use it first. Then it was emptied and brought into my room to be re-filled, and it got to be a habit of Pym's to come into my room in his pyjamas and awake me by shying a wet sponge at me as I lay in bed. It happened one morning that this process was reversed, and by some accident I was first served. I had tubbed and was already half dressed when the man came in for the bath, and I learned that Pym had not yet been called. I soaked my sponge and stole noiselessly into his room. This was my first visit to his quarters since I had seen him engaged in the manufacture of the hollow cube of teak. Pym lay snoring with his mouth open, and I landed the charged sponge so dexterously that he woke with a mouth full of water and leapt up spluttering.

He tumbled out of bed with a laugh, and somehow this little bit of horseplay seemed to have cleared the air between us. I stood there chattering whilst the man brought in the tub and filled it, and suddenly my eye fell on a great mass of vegetation a foot square solid, with luxuriant, slender pale green branches radiating from it everywhere.

"What's this?" I asked, touching it with my foot, but Pym pushed me out of doors and turned the key on me.

"A study in botany. Get out, and let me have my tub."

He came downstairs to chota hazri looking very tired and haggard, and Dewar and I both

told him how worn he seemed. Pym set it all down to the climate and the mosquitoes, and promised to get acclimatised by-and-by. He took to lying down a good deal in the daytime, and I began to be a little anxious for him.

A week went by in this fashion, and in the interim I did all I could to persuade him to get down to the coast or up into the mountain country, but he took no heed of my warnings and beseechings. He had the same bright smile for all of them, and declared that he would be as well as ever in a day or two. The result was that I let him rest, though I still watched him with some anxiety.

One night I lay awake in actual torment. The mosquito net had been folded back whilst the windows had been open, and there were scores of the pestilential insects in the folds. They sang their shrill threatening song everywhere, and bit and bit and bit,

and a tam-o'-shanter. I could see him plainly, outlined as he was against a great square of light. I slipped behind the door to let him pass, and closed it a little further.

"Ven!" I heard him whisper. "Ven! Ned, old man, are you awake?"

"Awake? Yes," I answered. "Come in."

He came in and struck a match. I found the candlestick for him, and he lit the candle.

"Go and call Dewar," he said, quietly.

"Why," I objected, "it's three o'clock in the morning."

"Never mind," said Pym. "He'll be glad enough to get up."

There was a look of exultation on his face, and he held up before me a tiny steel casket, very strong and solid looking for its size, with earth and rust about it.

"If Dewar's key fits that," said Pym, "I've



"I landed the charged sponge so dexterously."

until at last I rolled out of bed in a fit of positive exasperation. I walked into the corridor, and there in the broad Indian moonlight I saw that Pym's door was open. I looked into his room. The bed was empty, and had not even been disturbed. I went back to my own room to look at my watch, and found that it was nearly three o'clock. Just as I was stealing out again I heard a step upon the stair, and half closing my door, I peered round the edge to see who it might be. It was Pym himself in knickerbockers

got his sacred sapphire back again. I don't care to go to sleep until I know, and I'm dead beat, Ned. Go and call him."

I waited no further bidding, but sped off at once, barefooted as I was, and knocked at Dewar's door. He came out to see what was the matter. I told him to bring the key he had shown me down at Peshawur, and he went back into his room and came out again in a state of much excitement.

"Is that what you wanted?" Pym asked, holding the small steel casket out to him.

He seemed to leap at it, and all moist and muddy as it was, he fell to kissing it and huddling it against his cheek. But when he tried to get the key into the lock he trembled so that his hands were useless to him. I took the casket and the key away from him, and in a second, under the candlelight, out burst a glorious bluish beam, which took one's breath



"It was Pym himself."

away to look at. I write now as I felt then. I daresay that a bit of sapphire-coloured glass would have shone about as brightly, but it was the splendid imagination of the thing.

Dewar behaved like a madman, and all his cry was "How? how? how? How did you find it? Where?"

"Come with me," said Pym, "and I'll tell you." We followed him into his own room, I carrying the candle and Dewar hugging the casket and the jewel. "Now," said Pym. "Secundum artem." He took up a small pasteboard box, which turned out to have a partition in it. From each of its sides he poured on the table before him a half handful of gravel. "This," he said, "I found in Jow Rhi's

little bit of a back garden, and this I scraped off the ground on the hillside road to Peshawur. It doesn't belong to the hillside road, and the plain inference is that it was carried there. You had a good look at that spot, old man," he went on, addressing me. "Did you notice anything like this?" He took from his pocket a ragged bit of grey cement. "That with the gravel over it looked uncommonly like native earth, eh? I've guessed where *that* was," indicating the gem, which Dewar still held clasped lovingly in both hands at his cheek, "ever since I noticed Jow Rhi's little habit of riding past it twice or thrice a day, and looking to see if the soil had been disturbed. If I could have dared to use a pickaxe I could have got at it long ago. If I could have dared to use a little gunpowder I could have got at it. But our mutual friend was on the outlook night and day, and I had to think of other means. I hit at last on a method which enabled me to compel him to find the means I wanted. You remember, Ned, that down in Peshawur we dined one night with the political agent? Well, I wrote to him, and I got him to send up to me a clever native policeman who could play the wandering dervish. Every morning so long as he was here my dervish begged his ammunition from Jow Rhi.

"Look here," he continued, rising from his seat, and turning over the mass of vegetation I had questioned him about. It had flourished out by this time into an extraordinary efflorescence, and crept over a quarter of the room. "Look at the bottom of it." There were half a dozen small square teak boards, all torn and broken at the edges, and a number of long thin screws sticking out of them, and a tangle of broken whipcord, which Pym pulled apart with his thumb and finger as he talked. "These," he said, "are the remains of the box I made. When you were gone I tried the experiment I had in my mind. I bored a hole into one side of the box and I filled it with dry pease. When it was as full as I could get it, I poured in water. The pease expanded. They had to expand. They burst the box, they broke the cord, and here they are. Give them time, and they would wreck the strongest castle ever built by man.

"I wanted a silent slow explosive, and here I found it, and what is more, I timed it. Our friend Jow Rhi's cement had shrunk a little, and had left a tiny crack. There was just room for the insertion of a single grain of pulse, and it was my sham dervish's business to

drop the pulse grain by grain until the hole in which Jow Rhi had hidden his treasure was full. That took a fortnight, and, as I have said already, Jow Rhi found the ammunition. Then all that was left was to find a tun-dish and a gourd of water, and await the explosion. Jow Rhi saw nothing in one little sprout of vegetation in a crack of that arid soil. But the whole thing opened up quite quietly to-night, and here's your sapphire."

Dewar dashed off on the instant, and came back with a draft on his Bombay agent for two thousand pounds. Pym set it in his pocket-book without a word, and sat examining the stone. Dewar's hands hovered about

it as if he were hungry for the mere feel of it, and could not trust it out of his own keeping.

We set out for Peshawur that same day, and when we were back in the apartments we had formerly inhabited, Pym drew out the draft and deliberately tore it to fragments.

"You madman!" I cried, rising to prevent him. "Dewar's a man of wealth. He can afford the reward, and you have earned it."

"Not I," said Pym. "I hadn't the heart to tell him, but the gem's a fraud. It may have enjoyed its reputation for four thousand years for aught I know, or forty thousand for anything I care, but it's nothing more or less than a bit of blue crystal, and isn't worth ten pounds in any market."



"Out burst a glorious bluish beam."

THE INVESTIGATIONS OF JOHN PYM.

III.—The Affair of the Hundred Rouble Notes.

IT was on the fourth of December in the preceding year that London was startled by the murder in Harley Street. The facts, which are probably still within the memory of many thousands, may be very briefly recapitulated here. A constable on his beat was passed at about three o'clock in the morning by two well-dressed men, who were conversing together earnestly in some foreign language. Ten minutes later the officer found one of these men recumbent in the snow, stone dead. He had been stabbed through the heart, and had fallen without a cry. As he lay there a second blow had been delivered, and in the second wound the fatal dagger was left. The strange part about the whole affair was that the dagger transfixed a Russian bank-note for one hundred roubles, and that on careful examination by an expert this note proved to be a forgery. The imitation, both of the paper and the engraving, was so clever and precise, that a fortnight elapsed before this discovery was made. No real trace of the criminal was found, although in the newly fallen snow his footsteps were tracked for a considerable distance. They were finally lost amidst innumerable signs of street traffic, and when the police had had the case in hand for a fortnight it was publicly announced that they were wholly at fault, and could not boast even that customary delusive clue of which we hear so often.

At the end of that fortnight London was startled anew. The body of a well-dressed,

well-built, and well-nourished man was found on the top of a house in Fitzroy Street. There had been a long and dreary frost, followed by a rapid thaw, and the tenant of the house on the roof of which the body was found had been troubled by a leakage from the pipe on the roof. He had sent up a man through the trap-door in the roof to repair whatever damage might exist, and the work-



"Two well-dressed men were conversing together."

man returned, pale and horrified, with the news that the dead body of a man lay there immediately under the coping, and that the overflow of water had been caused by the fact that a fur cap saturated with melted snow had fallen into the mouth of the downward pipe and checked the customary current of the roof drainage. The police were of

course instantly summoned. The body was carried to the nearest licensed house, there to await an inquest, and it transpired that nothing was found upon it which could offer the faintest indication of the dead man's identity. The opinion of the two or three medical men who were consulted was that he had died of exposure; but what brought him in so strange a situation was beyond guessing. He had twenty or thirty pounds in English money about him. He wore a coat of valuable sealskin, and presented every evidence of having been in a condition of complete physical well-being. The two deaths would not have been at all associated in the public mind but for the curious fact that in a pocket-book in the breast-pocket of the sealskin coat was found a roll of notes, each for one hundred roubles, which, being examined, proved to have been printed from the same plate and of the same quality and kind of paper as the note which was found fixed by the dagger to the breast of the murdered man in Harley Street a fortnight earlier. Everybody talked about the case, and for a few days it was indeed the one absorbing topic of conversation all over London. Pym and I discussed it pretty often, and, like the rest of the world, we made nothing of it. Old Macquarie was Divisional Surgeon for the district in which the second man was found, and in one of his periodical visits to my chambers he told me a little earlier than the rest of the world what news there was to tell. The man whose dead body was found on the roof was one Alexis Demitroff. He was a Russian exile, who had within the last three or four weeks migrated from Paris to London. He was a prominent man amongst the Anarchists of Europe, and had been suspected of more than one attempt upon the life of the Czar.

These events happened only a few months after our great Jew statesman had been plenteously laughed at for his declaration that Europe was honeycombed with secret societies, and thoughtful people began to notice the numerous indications which at this time offered themselves in favour of Disraeli's prescience.

In the ordinary course of my professional work it fell to my lot to write a leading article about this double mystery, and, making

bricks without straw, I was able to do no more than any commonly intelligent person would have done in reviewing the two cases. I pointed out and speculated on the fact of the similarity of the forged note found pinned to the breast of the murdered man, and its companions in the pocket-book of the man who had died of exposure. I argued from this fact some possibly mysterious association between the two, and was, perforce, content to leave the mystery unsolved. Pym and I talked the matter over once or twice, and arrived at no conclusion about it; but on a sudden, and without a word of notice, I found that my companion had flown, and for a week I saw nothing of him.

When he came back he remarked casually that he had taken a run to Paris, and since

he was in no humour to tell me anything of the business which had carried him there,

I naturally forbore to question him. We



"My eye fell upon an uncommonly bold and clever sketch."

resumed our old intercourse on the old lines, and were in and out of each other's rooms as often as we pleased.

Late one afternoon when the winter dusk had already fallen, and I had finished my modicum of copy for the day, I heard Pym's footstep overhead, and went lightly upstairs to have a chat with him. When I reached his sitting-room he was splashing noisily about at his toilet in the next apartment, and called out to know who was there. I

answered him, and he told me that he would be with me in a minute. My eye fell upon an uncommonly bold and clever sketch in pen and ink, executed on a sheet of white blotting-paper with a quill pen ; and when Pym came back into the room I had taken this in hand and was examining it with some interest.

"Oh," said he carelessly, taking the drawing from my hand, "I didn't tell you about that ; it's unsigned, but that's a sketch of Grevin's. I met him by the purest hazard. He made that sketch in my presence, and I begged it from him. Pretty lifelike, isn't it ?"

"Lifelike enough," I answered. "Is it a fancy sketch or a portrait ?"



"A portrait sketch from memory," Pym answered. "He had seen the man by chance a week before, and was asked to describe him. He laughed, and said that a sketch was better than any description, and he dashed off that in the mere turn of a hand. I never saw anything so dexterous and rapid in my life—it was quite an astonishment. Had I known who the artist was at the moment I would have got him to initial it for me, but I only learnt his name when he had left us."

Pym seemed uncommonly proud of this little souvenir of the great French caricaturist, and for the whole hour during which I remained in his rooms he dandled the drawing in his hands, and inspected it from time to time with an air of pleased proprietorship.

Very shortly after this he began to be busy

and pre-occupied. He was out till all hours in the night, and asleep the greater part of the short winter day ; and so it came about that we saw but very little of each other.

A full week had gone by in this fashion, when, just as I had finished luncheon, he came pell-mell into my work-room, and asked me to do him an instant and immediate favour.

"Do you know anything," he asked me, "about practical printing? Could you, for instance, earn a living—any sort of a living—as a compositor?"



"This won't do," said Pym "

I told him that I thought I knew such theory as there was to be known in the compositor's business, but that I had never had any practice.

"Could you," he asked, "if you were put to it, set up and distribute type—never mind how slowly and clumsily? Have you the requisite technical knowledge to do so much ?"

"Yes," I told him. "I know my boxes, if that is what you mean."

"I suppose," said Pym, "that that is what I mean. Can you sit down and draw a compositor's case, and mark the position of the various letters and signs?"

"Well, yes," I thought I could do that ; but when in obedience to his request I sat down and attempted that simple task, I found myself uncertain and confused.

"This won't do," said Pym, when I had wasted a quarter of an hour boggling. "Can you take me down to your office and introduce me to a competent man? I will pay the fellow for his time and trouble, and it is

a thing that I happen just now to want to understand."

I gave him his wish later in the afternoon when the men were at work filling their cases. I introduced him to the "father of the chapel," a courteous and intelligent old fellow whom I had known for years, and who had only to hear Pym's name to be willing to oblige him. Anything like the rapidity with which Pym absorbed that little bit of practical knowledge I had never seen. The instructor ran over the boxes once.

"Now," said Pym, "let me see what I know." He was wrong at the first essay in half a dozen instances; but at the second trial he was literally letter perfect. He repeated his lesson three or four times over to make sure of himself, slipped a sovereign into the old gentleman's hand, and came away.

We drove back to my rooms together, and there on a sheet of foolscap he drew a pattern of a pair of cases, and marked the position of each sign and space. He entered into this freak with the same intent earnestness which characterised all his proceedings; and when his lesson was over he crumpled up the sheet of paper, threw it into the fire-grate, and abandoning that theme altogether, began to talk of his recent adventures in Paris, and notably of an introduction he had secured to one Mons. Vergueil, a French detective, whose work he had notably admired in the case of Gilead Gilfoil. He told me the story, the details of which I had half forgotten, as he had it from Mons. Vergueil's own lips, and he noted a singular characteristic of modesty in that astute professional. Mons. Vergueil attributed his professional pre-eminence entirely to the gifts of fortune. He allowed, or pretended to allow, nothing for his own astuteness, but professed to believe that unless he had been the luckiest of

living men in his profession he would have been the least successful.

"That is all the old gentleman's gammon," said Pym, "though of course everybody has a little bit of luck at one time or another." As he spoke he was turning over a lot of tumbled papers on his writing-desk; and from amongst them he drew the sketch of which I have already spoken.

"That's a bit of luck, for instance," said he, and stowed it away in his desk with a smile of some complexity.

We dined together that night at a favourite restaurant of ours, and, though the weather was milder than it had been for a month past, Pym insisted, in spite of my remonstrances, in putting on a very heavy fur overcoat. He was in high spirits all through the dinner, and he went away at about nine o'clock in an unusually brilliant mood.

I saw no more of him, and heard nothing from him, for a week; but at the end of that time I met him on the stairs. He was haggard and unshaven, and his dress, which was usually rather prim and precise for a book-worm and a man of science, was strangely disordered. His dandy overcoat was irretrievably ruined. It was covered with weather stains, as if he had been sleeping in the open air; and when



"We dined together."

I laid a hand upon it, I found that the cloth part of it, at least, was saturated through and through.

"What does this mean?" I asked; but he put me on one side.

"Don't bother me just now, Ned. I am deadly tired, and I want a change, and an hour or two's sleep." He slipped away before I could interrogate him further, and I heard him unlock the door of his own chambers and bolt it behind him.

Naturally on so broad a hint I left my friend alone; but naturally also I speculated in my own mind a good deal about the nature of the business which had kept him away so long, and had brought him into so curious a condition. I put two and two together pretty often in the course of the next week, and never by any chance made four of them; but at last Pym condescended to enlighten me.

I received a note from him dated from the house in Fitzroy Street, requesting me to join him there, and to ask for Mr. Smith. The appointment was for eight o'clock, and I set out in a thick drizzle to keep it. The down-fall was a mingling of fine rain and snow; and this, freezing on the pavement as it fell, made the roadway quite impossible for horses and almost impracticable for pedestrians. I had a dozen warning stumbles before I reached the address I was bound for, and one side of my overcoat was sheathed in thin ice before I knocked at the door.

A smart maid answered my summons, and on my application for Mr. Smith, developed a sudden chilliness of manner and said, "Top storey—the attics—you cannot miss them—there is a light all the way." With this she left me to my own devices, and I mounted a great tall, lank ladder of a house, with staircases in it that seemed interminable. At last I came upon the final landing, and Pym opened a sudden door and hooked me inward with a motion of the forefinger.

He sat in a very commonplace little garret room with a dormer window and a sloping roof; a very tiny grate was glowing with as much fire as it could hold, but the air was chill and biting, and the apartment was far too freely ventilated for the time of year. Pym was clad in an overcoat and a tweed travelling cap; and as he resumed the seat he had just vacated to receive me he drew a fur travelling rug about his knees, and then stretched forth his hands towards the meagre fire with an almost convulsive shudder. There were a pair of candles on the mantelpiece, and by their light the man looked absolutely aghast. He had contracted a

dreadful cold, and when he spoke, all his "m's" were "b's," and his "n's" were "l's." "Dolt mild be," said Pym in answer to my look of wonderment. Not to be too phonetic with him, he went on to say that he was all right—that he had contracted a bad cold, and had simply asked me up to advise with him, and possibly to aid him.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" I asked, and Pym responded very sagely, "By-and-by. I do not think," he added, "that I can carry on this game much longer by myself, and whatever I do I must not miss to-night. You are an old campaigner, Ned, and you won't mind doing a turn at sentry go for a friend. You shall have a hot supper when you come down, and I'll have the room like a furnace for you."

This was all very enigmatical, but I was used to his airs of mystery by this time, and I knew that there was nothing to do but to await his own time for explanation, unless I desired to provoke him to an obdurate silence.

I took a cigar from the box he wordlessly pushed over to me, and awaited what he had to say with as perfect a show of patience as I could command.

"You remember," he began by-and-by, "the Harley Street murder?" I nodded merely. "You remember the man who was frozen to death on the roof next door?" I nodded again. "I have nearly shared that unhappy beggar's fate. Any night this fortnight past," said Pym, "I have been on the same errand."

"You associate the two things in your own mind as I did?" I asked him.

"No," said Pym, "not quite as you did. I associated the two things all the same."

No man is superior to the temptations of vanity, and John Pym certainly was conscious of his own gifts in the enterprise on which he had so recently embarked, although I had known him for years as at once probably the most learned and the most modest man in London; but in the novel enterprise to which he had set himself in these latter months he had not yet found a chance of acclimatization; and he was as vain about his own penetration, and his own good fortune, as a peacock, or a schoolboy.

"I went to Paris, you will remember," said Pym, gnawing at the stem of his unlighted pipe, and shivering violently. "On the breast of the man who was found in Harley Street there was a hundred-rouble note, which turned out to be a forgery. In

the breast-pocket of the man who was found on the roof overhead next door from here there was a roll of forged hundred-rouble notes. I went round London for a week, and I visited every bureau de change in vain. Not a note had been cashed in London so far as I could discover. I had no time to fly further afield than Paris, but I went there ; and there I found a solitary money-changer who had been taken in. He had cashed a bundle of the identical notes for something like three thousand francs, and it was my query which incited him in the first instance to examine them closely enough to detect the trick which had been played upon him. He put the matter at once into the hands of the police, and the police fixed upon a certain Parisian scoundrel who bears the name of Pierre France as the probably guilty party. Now I have fallen in for a slice of M. Vergueil's luck.

The king of all French caricaturists, by a double stroke of fortune, happened to be changing a handful of English notes for French gold at the moment M. Pierre France presented his Russian notes ; and he happened again to be in the bureau de change at the moment when I was inquiring about the man. He had observed him for a minute only ; but understanding for what purpose the gentleman was wanted, he made me a sketch of him. The Parisian police knew the man, and had established a moderately close watch upon him—not as a forger, but as a Nihilist. There was a sort of vague and general conclusion in their minds that he had come to London, and, when I spent a day or two in vain inquiry about him, I came back here. It is not difficult to discover the haunts of the Nihilists and Anarchists, because they are all 'mouthers' and platform men more or less. They advertise themselves with an astonishing freedom, and I found my way amongst them easily enough. Pierre France in

two or three hours' time from now at the latest will be at work next door. His name next door is Fritz von Bergen ; for the rascal is an Alsatian, and speaks French and German indifferently. In spite of the 'von,' he poses



"A very commonplace little garret room."

as a tailor—a lamentable decay, you observe, in family prospects somewhere.

"Von Bergen, one would think, would hardly be a tailor, but my Pierre France, who is, you observe, the same person, is not a tailor, but a compositor. Did you ever notice, Venables, those curious small signs which enable you to judge of a man's business or profession? I have only gone in for that kind of observation recently, but I find that every handicraft leaves a recognisable mark upon the hand of the man who exercises it. The compositor's mark is slight, but, if you look closely, unmistakable, and my Alsatian friend is by trade not a tailor, but a compositor. The thumb, the index finger, and the middle finger bear signs which are open to any observer, and give him away in a moment. Now by the date of Grevin's sketch I have identified my Pierre in a club

which meets above the first public-house round the corner. Pierre's thumb and finger have been pretty often under my nose of late, for Pierre is a person who gesticulates freely, and I have found opportunity for observation. He lodges with a tailor with whom he professes to work—a brotherly Von Bergen, who has a little tailoring hall at Islington; but no man can work all day and all night, and since Pierre works all night next door every night for a stretch of ten hours at a time, I conceive it probable that he sleeps somewhere. I have found, as a matter of fact, that he sleeps in the establishment of his compatriot tailor of Islington."



"Presented his Russian notes."

Pym paused, and spread both hands over the little fire.

"Now," he said, seeing that I answered nothing, "will you take an hour or two's turn for a friend? You know your boxes by this time."

I was piqued as well as puzzled; but I responded that I had revived an old acquaintance with the compositor's case, whilst Pym had made acquaintance with it for the first time, and that I was tolerably certain of my old knowledge in that direction.

Pym rose, and pushed a table to one corner of the room, and set a chair upon it.

"The trap-door overhead," he told me, "leads you directly to the roof. There is a three-foot coping, so that there is little danger of falling off, though I advise you to be cautious all the same. Within two or three yards of you when you emerge you will find a skylight precisely similar to this. The room below, if not illuminated at the moment of your arrival, will be lit in a very little while. I want you to watch the man below. Take a look at his portrait first—there is Grevin's sketch of him, and I warrant you to know him amongst a hundred thousand. The man is the sole compositor, the editor, and chief contributor to a publication known as *L'Anarchiste*, an incendiary print which is now being circulated all over Europe. He

writes nothing, but commits his thoughts to type as he composes them. I have here a pocketful of notes, which, when the time comes, I shall be able to compare with the forms he has already in type. If I were able to climb that roof, and live there for

another night or two, I would not ask your aid; but I am almost rooted here by rheumatism, and, in a night like this, an hour or two's exposure might be fatal. Now, will you go, Ned, and stand watch for me? The man is approaching the end of a history of the acts of his own party during the last three months. I know already enough to hang him twice over, but I want the conclusion of his story."

I had mounted the table and the chair before he had concluded this statement; and when I saw that he had finished what he had to say, I propped up the yielding trap-door with my head, and with a single vigorous scramble reached the roof. The

sleet was falling still, and the slates were coated with a thin ice ; but for the moment I thought little enough of the inclemency of the weather, and crawled towards the faint glare of light which Pym indicated by a final wave of the hand as I disappeared. Crawling with great caution towards that glare of light, I looked down upon him. An ordinary printer's frame was mounted with an ordinary pair of cases. In one corner of the room stood something clothed with a cheap counterpane ; from the outlines of which I guessed that a copper-plate press was concealed beneath it. Near the frame stood a man of middle age, with a lustrous bald head, which shone in the light of a double gas-bracket over the case, like heated metal. The man, with elaborate deliberation, took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves, assumed an apron of black glazed linen, and set to work. My heart was in my mouth to think that I had arrived at the critical moment, and had so far missed nothing. The fellow took his composing-stick in his left hand, and, taking a brass rule from the quadrat box, spat upon it, and polished it upon the leg of his trousers. Then he glanced everywhere about him, and plunged a certain finger and thumb into the capital "C" box. He was not a very rapid workman ; and if he had been twice as swift as he was, I had knowledge and experience enough to enable me to follow the motion of his hand. "Ce que nous avons fait"—so the letters he picked up one by one arranged themselves—"nous avons fait et nous n'avons ni reproche ni peur si nous avons tué le scélérat Sébastien Lepage." The man had gone so far when I heard a grating noise at a little distance above me ; and, looking up the slant and glancing roof which had a faint reflection on it from the reflected light of the gas-lamps shed from a low cloud, I seemed dimly to perceive a moving shadow on the ridge of the roof. I watched this like a lynx for a full minute ; and, if anything had been there at all, it subsided so gradually and so dimly that I was uncertain even of its presence.

The hand of the man below, when I again

turned to regard him, pursued its even pace from the little boxes to the composing-stick, and back again ; but I had lost the thread of the sentence he had been following, and was puzzled for a while to take it up again. All the same I began to understand where Pym had got his shivering fit, and in what fashion he had contrived to ruin that costly fur over-



"The trap-door overhead."

coat of his, and why he had thought it worth his while to incur both of these damages. The sense of a possibly dangerous neighbour on my left obscured my faculty of observation every here and there ; and, old campaigner as I am, I confess that my nerve was hardly as steady under this curious strain as I could have wished it to be. Preoccupied as I was by the sense of possible danger, and the necessity of resuming that watchfulness which I had for a full minute relaxed, I could yet find time in my mind for a sideway glance at Pym, and could understand well enough how he had grown haggard under a fortnight of such cares ; but whilst I was thinking thus, and was settling myself once

more to a fixed contemplation of the man beneath me, I heard a faint noise behind, and turning my head, as I confess, in some nervous apprehension, I saw Pym's head and shoulders appearing above the roof, and caught his whisper, "Anything going on, old man?" At that instant I got as fine a scare as I have ever had in the course of an adventurous life; for there rang out within a yard or two of my ear a pistol shot, and a dark, scarcely seen figure slid down the slippery and ice-covered roof. The figure would inevitably have shot over the coping, but for Pym's intervening hand. There was a tremendous clatter in the room I had recently quitted, and when I had scrambled to my hands and knees I made out Pym holding on to the leg of a man whose head had come into violent contact with the coping, and holding on by the leg of his captive only. His body was projecting half through the trap-door in the roof like that of an unwilling harlequin, and when, after something of a struggle, I had pulled him on to the roof itself, he still retained his grip on the trousers of the fallen intruder.

"This fellow," said Pym, releasing his man, and kneeling down to feel about him with cautious hands in the rain and darkness, "has been my 'bête noire' for a fortnight past, I fancy. He has broken nothing unless it's his head."

The man gave a half moan, and struggled to stand upright, but Pym's hands and my own restrained him.

"Où suis je?" said he.

"He is all right," said Pym, relaxing his hold upon him, and groping about at the base of the roof. "Get him down into the



"Crawling with great caution."

room below, and let us see what we can make of him."

Pym went first, dropping himself through the trap-door on to the table, and there replacing the chair, so that I might most conveniently lower our captive. The man groaned bitterly, and I had hard work to drag him up the slippery slates; but when I had once got a purchase for my knees on the edge of the trap-door, I dropped him through, feet foremost, and Pym took charge of him. Between us we lowered him on to the table, when I at once descended, and sat up on the cage which filled one side of the tiny apartment.

"I know this chap," said Pym.

The man sat with a dazed and half-unconscious look, touching his head with his left hand from time to time, and looking at his fingers as if in search of blood-stains from some imagined wound.

"Your name," he said, "is Emile Grandier."

The man looked at him with a glance which seemed to me to be one of acquiescence.

"You are five feet eight inches, thirty-seven years of age, clean shaven on cheek and chin. You have a heavy black moustache, and no perceptible eyebrow, and you were born in Marseilles."

The automatic motion of the man's hand ceased, and he stared in a dazed and fatuous fashion at his interlocutor.

"That is all right," said Pym, "and that goes near to completing the chain of evidence; we'll have the rest by-and-by. If you will

look in the box in the corner, Venables, you will find a revolver. Thank you. Just mount guard over this fellow for three minutes—even on a night like this I suppose one may find a police-constable somewhere."

He snatched up a wide-awake hat which lay upon an elbow of the cage on which our unexpected visitor was seated, and dashed downstairs. The prisoner gave no trouble, but fell back to his automatic search for a suspected wound, seeming surprised at every return of his fingers from

his head to find no sign of blood. Pym came back after a very brief interval of time; and behind him sounded the solid tread of a London constable, who, in his regulation boots, made the hollow staircase echo as he mounted to the upper regions of the house.

"You have placed your comrade next door," said Pym, and the constable asserted by a nod of the head, and a sufficiently surly affirmative. "I give this man in charge, Emile Grandier, age thirty-seven, native of Marseilles, and compositor by trade. I give him in charge as an accessory after

reporter by himself of *L'Anarchiste* for, as I gather, the first of April next. That trick of the printer's boxes served me well, Venables. I have a personal description of every man concerned in this matter—name, address, age, occupation, everything. Our friend Pierre



"I got as fine a scare as I have ever had."

the fact in the murder of Sebastien Lepage in Harley Street on the fourth of December last."

"Very well, sir," said the officer, and at Pym's invitation took a seat. We left him guarding the dazed man whilst Pym and I climbed down the winding stair until we reached the doorway. There, at my companion's instigation, I whistled for a hansom, and as we drove towards Scotland Yard he gave me his whole story.

"Our friend, Inspector Prickett, has been engaged upon this search," said Pym, in a chuckling voice of intense self-appreciation, "and I want him to be present at the capture, because once or twice he has been so far seeing as to tell me that all chance of a clue was lost. If our friend Pierre had chosen to pass as a compositor I might never have suspected him at all in this affair, and might never have chosen to watch him, though I carried his portrait in my pocket; but a man who pretends to exercise one trade, whilst he bears the signs of another, invites attention, and when I found friend Pierre sleeping the day through, and working all night long, it seemed worth while to find out what he worked at. I have here"—he touched his breast pocket as he spoke—"the advance sheets

is a curious personage, and one of a kind with whom we shall have to deal pretty closely as times go on. He is one of the men who propose to deal universal mercy to the world by means of dynamite; and he means business. The rouble notes were forged for no profit of his own, but simply to furnish means for his peculiar propaganda. The man who was killed in Harley Street was the engraver of those notes, and was killed simply and purely because he rebelled against the idea of so admirable a forgery being wasted on merely political purposes. It was his hope to flood the bureaux de change of Europe with the fruits of his labour, and for that ambition he sacrificed his life. The other gentleman, identified as Alexis Demitroff, who was found frozen to death on the roof where I have so nearly followed his fatal example, was, like himself and our friend Pierre, a French compositor. He made it his business once too often to watch what was going on in that garret chamber, and without my interference the story of his death would within a day or two of the first of April have reached every secret society in Europe. We shall probably ante-date that exposure at Bow Street tomorrow morning. And now tell me," Pym

concluded, "did you in your brief and early disturbed watch read anything? Was the man at work at all?"

"Ce que nous avons fait," I recited, "nous avons fait, et nous n'avons ni reproche ni peur si nous avons tué Sébastien Lepage. There," I continued, "came a disturbance, and I ceased to watch."

"That is enough," said Pym, and almost as he spoke the cab swung into the yard, and halted at the stucco portico there.

Pym was occupied inside for scarce a minute, and emerged with my intimate acquaintance, Mr. Inspector Prickett, who rode back with us bodkin-wise, and preserved all the way a grim, and, as I felt, a disappointed silence. We knocked at the door of the house which neighboured that in which Pym had taken up his residence for the last fortnight, and there the Inspector, stating his authority in the briefest way, marched upwards. We reached the attic-door, following him in stealthy silence, and at his knock a startled voice in French called, "Who's there?" Prickett, by way of sole answer, set his knee against the flimsy door, and the meagre lock went flying. We were all in the room in a second; and its proper occupant at the mere sight of us made a dash towards a long galley of type which rested on a stand in one corner of the room. Prickett caught

him flying as a sharp man at point fields a ball, and Pym, in spite of his rheumatism, was between the prisoner and the galley in a flash. An eight-page form of closely set type stood propped against the wall, and Pym, producing his pocket-book, indicated it with extreme composure. "I shall want that printed, and the pages translated. I shall then want it compared with the notes I have taken nightly on the roof above, and I think that in the last stick or two of matter to be found here," indicating the galley, "my friend, Mr. Edward Venables, will find something to confirm." He stooped down and spelled laboriously over the inverted letters. "You ought to be quicker at this business than I am, Venables," he said, after a while. "Take a look at this, and see what you can make of it."

At the very first glance my eye fell upon the words "Ce que nous avons fait nous avons fait," etc., and I translated into English for Mr. Prickett's benefit the statement, "if we have killed Sébastien Lepage, it is simply because he proposed to make an ignoble use of funds procured for a lofty purpose."

"That is about enough, I think," said Prickett, producing a pair of hand-cuffs from his coat-tail pockets; "but where is the other rascal you spoke about?"

"The other rascal," Pym responded, "is upstairs next door, but so far as I can gather he will be charged simply as an accessory in forgery."

I tramped downstairs, rang the next door bell, tramped upstairs, and relieved the constable of his guard.

The pair appeared at Bow Street next morning, and as for the rest of the history, anybody interested in it may refer to the journals of 'eighty-five for the report of the proceedings.



"Prickett caught him flying."

THE INVESTIGATIONS OF JOHN PYM.



IV. - The Story of the Unmade Dynamite.

HE police, "from information received," made a raid on a house in Bethesda Street, Little Ethel Road, Battersea. Their one captive was an ignorant Irish labourer, thirty-five years of age, by name Michael Fahey. The man made no resistance, and seemed surprised at the inroad of the police ; but in the kitchen of the little house certain very startling and remarkable discoveries were made. An eighteen-gallon barrel of glycerine, a very large-sized carboy of nitric acid, and a quantity of the kind of clayey earth which is most frequently used in the manufacture of dynamite, were all found under Michael Fahey's charge ; and in the kitchen-boiler was discovered a quantity—amounting to some gallons—of nitro-glycerine, which, according to the reports published in the daily newspapers, had been so unskilfully and incautiously compounded as to be in a most dangerously explosive condition.

The discovery made a prodigious sensation ; for just at this time the vapourings of the Clan-na-Gael and the known temper of a considerable number of extremists in America had combined, with one or two harmless but noisy overt acts, to create a feeling of widespread uneasiness throughout London.

Michael Fahey appeared at Wandsworth Police-court, and had little or nothing to say for himself. His short and simple annals came to this. He had been out of work for two or three months, when a gentleman bearing the name of Jones O'Brien, and giving an address which Fahey readily surrendered to the police, had employed him at a salary of half a crown a day to act as caretaker of the house in which he was found. The barrel, and the carboy, and the clay, as well as the contents of the boiler, were in the house when he was instated in the idlest and most profitable appointment he had ever received. The man gave his own address readily, and so far as the most persistent enquiries on the

part of the police could carry them, they were compelled to admit that Fahey, though poor and ignorant, was sober, hardworking, and orderly in life—perhaps as harmless and insignificant a citizen of the empire as could easily be found within its borders.

Mr. Jones O'Brien was nowhere to be discovered, and no such person had ever been seen or heard of at the address he gave. The police, of course, were highly complimented by the press on the *nous* and watchfulness of which they had given evidence. Prevention, the journals argued with a striking unanimity, was better than cure ; and it was here evident that a diabolical plot for the destruction of life and property in our midst had been frustrated. Michael Fahey was several times remanded, and the public interest in the discovery was already fading, as in these swiftly racing days the public interest has a knack of fading, no matter how vast and important the issues which aroused it. Topics of fresh importance crowded out the dwindling interest in the great dynamite discovery, and the bulk of the world had already practically forgotten it.

Even whilst the matter was at its most exciting point, the public had contrived to get some amusement out of it ; for Mrs. Michael Fahey, a typical daughter of Erin, was in and out of the Wandsworth Police-court during and between the hearings with appeals to everybody, questionings of police, public, and magistrate, and proclamations of her husband's innocence. The woman was not noisy or obstreperous ; but she was insistent, and not to be denied, and it became at length a common episode of the day to expel her with no more force than was necessary from the precincts of the court. She spoke in a mixture of English and her native Erse, and was not always intelligible, and for a while the reporters of the press and their readers found the poor creature's utterances very droll indeed.

Whilst Michael Fahey was undergoing his third or fourth remand, we read again of the

poor creature having made a scene at Scotland Yard.

One evening I was coming home from my office, having ground out my daily leader there, when I noticed under the corner gas-lamp as I turned into my own street a woman with a shawl pulled over her head, who made a half-dart towards me as I came into the circle of the lamplight. She recoiled on seeing me; but a moment later I heard her footsteps behind me, and when I paused at my door to get out my latch-key she arrested her own footsteps, and stood on a level with me in the roadway. I was already at the door when I looked at her for a second time. She was shabbily attired, and I could just see enough of her to lead me to think that she looked innocent and simple. Suddenly she stepped forward, and spoke in a very rich Irish brogue :

"Arr yew Misther Pym?"

"No," I answered; "what do you want with Mr. Pym?"

She held out a scrap of paper which she drew from underneath her shawl, and opening the hall door to get a better light than the nearest lamp afforded me, I read on the crumpled scrap these words, written in a round and clerkly hand, "Mrs. Michael

Fahey to see Mr. Pym, the eminent detective." The address of the house was appended.

"Who gave you this?" I asked. "Where do you come from?"

"They gev it me at the Yarrd," she said.

"Scotland Yard?" I queried.

She nodded by way of sole answer.

"Who gave it?" I asked her.

"Sorra one of me knows his name," she replied.

I learnt that it was an "illigant gintleman" and an "Inspecthor." Beyond that the woman knew nothing.

"If you will wait outside for a minute," I told her, "I will see if Mr. Pym is at home. If he is, perhaps he may see you."

I carried the scrap of paper up to Pym's rooms, and found him in his customary arm-chair, pipe in mouth, reading "Pickwick."

"Here's a visitor for you," I said, and detailed the circumstances of my interview downstairs.

Pym rang the bell, and instructed the girl who answered the summons to show up the woman who waited outside.

"These mechanical clerkly hands," said Pym, surveying the scrap of paper, "are all abominably alike; but I think I recognise this fist. This is my satiric friend, Inspector Prickett, I imagine."

The woman came in, and in the clearer light showed favourably enough. In a bucolic



"She held out a scrap of paper."

way she must have been pretty half a dozen years ago. Her look was one of perfect innocence and good faith, and it was plainly to be seen that she had been crying a good deal of late. Pym bade her sit down, and she was so reluctant to do this that he had to repeat his invitation as an order. She obeyed then at once, and at Pym's request began a narrative of her troubles. We knew all about them already from the newspapers, and Pym cut her wandering story short by detailing the facts for her himself.

And now what did she want? was the question.

Half a dozen leading enquiries from Pym sufficed to establish the fact that the introduction the woman had presented came from Inspector Prickett, and no other. He had sent her to Pym by way of a rather impudent

satire, as I thought; ironically describing him to the unhappy messenger as the greatest detective in the world, and as being always willing to work for nothing. That Michael was innocent, the woman vowed and declared with all her heart.

"Is it him use dynamite?" she said.
"He wouldn't harm a fly."

She was afraid the authorities were going to hang him, and as she gave vent to this idea she cried quite piteously.

"Very well, my good woman," said Pym. "I'll give you a note to take to Scotland Yard if you'll wait for a minute or two, and then I'll see what I can do for you. You must be quiet and patient, and you must not come here again until I send for you. Now tell me where I can find you if I want you, and then wait whilst I write my note."

Mrs. Michael Fahey began, after the manner of her race, to imprecate blessings and gratitude, but Pym wrote and sealed his note without paying any heed to her. He addressed it to Inspector Prickett at Scotland Yard, gave the woman a little loose silver,

made a note of her address, and sent her about her business.

"That's a challenge from the authorities," he said, holding up a scrap of paper when she had gone. "My friend Prickett is growing a little sore. I must see what I can do in this affair."

He put the scrap of paper away in his pocket-book, and went back to his study of



"Is it him use dynamite?" she said. "He wouldn't harm a fly."

"Pickwick," and I, for my own part, having had a hardish day's work, was glad enough to seek the quiet and repose of my own rooms.

Pym came to me about a week later, at the moment when I was in the act of hunting up a line from Tennyson. I laid the volume down open at "Aylmer's Field," and as Pym's eye fell upon the page he let off a crackling laugh.

"Very appropriate," he said, and laid his finger on these lines:—

"Watched even there; and one was set to watch
The watcher, and Sir Aylmer watched them all."

"I am playing Sir Aylmer," he said, with that dry look of self-complacence and superiority which I had often found irritating.

Very few people object to a man simply for being clever, and not many people are angry because the clever man is aware of his own ability. But when he betrays his appreciation of that fact too openly, he grows provoking. Pym wore all his weight of learning lightly, like a flower, but it took a

year or two to acclimatize him to the air of the field in which he had so lately begun to labour. When he was in the mood of self-exultation I made it my business to attempt to rile him by the assumption of a profound indifference; but I never succeeded. I tried it here, and failed as I had failed before, and as I failed more than once again; but by one of those odd little coincidences which are always happening in life, I came upon him a day or two later in the midst of his search, though as a matter of course I was not behind the scenes, and had no guess as to what he was aiming at.

I had been down to the old Charter-House to visit one of the Cistercian brothers—an ancient friend of my father's, who was now passing the peaceful twilight of his days in the midst of those surroundings in which he had begun his life more than three scores of years ago; and when our usual chat was over

behind a Jew of greasy complexion, who bore a bag upon his shoulder. The old-clothes man is no longer a recognised institution in the land; and I am almost afraid to say how many years it is since I saw for the last time the old triune head-dress of the tribe; but the Hebrew who shuffled along in front of Pym's sauntering footsteps was an old-clothes man beyond a doubt—a survival of the bygone years. He entered a shop in the street—the whole place had strangely altered since I knew it—and Pym followed him. I lingered for a minute or two; but, thinking that I would not give my friend the satisfaction of supposing me to be too much interested in his movements, I struck off briskly, and went about the business of the hour.

When I reached home that evening Pym was in my rooms waiting for me, and filling in his time by the perusal of a queer old Dutch

Xenophon which I had picked up a week or two before on a bookstall at a cost of fourpence.

"I have something to show you," said Pym, "if you will do me the favour to come upstairs, Ned."

I followed him at once, and he showed me spread out upon his table a suit of clothes made of a brownish-green broad-cloth.

"You remember Mrs. Michael Fahey?" he asked me, and I nodding acquiescence, he went on. "This represents the net result of my enquiries so far, and I want you to observe one or two things. I bought this pair of trousers, this waistcoat, and

this frock-coat from an old-clothes dealer near Barbican this afternoon. You will observe that at one time this suit of clothes was intensely respectable. It is made of a good cloth, and is well cut. The sleeves are lined with silk of a rather gay colour. So is the waistcoat. The lappel of the coat is of a dark twilled silk, which matches with the colour of the cloth. The workmanship is everywhere



and the dear old gentleman had exhausted his often-opened budget of reminiscences, I strolled for the first time for many years into old Smiffel, and even in that little changed part of London found myself lost at moments, and wondering as to whether my feet really trod the ground which I had once known so well. From Smiffel I found my way into the Barbican, and there at the corner of Rag Fair I sighted Pym sauntering at an easy pace

"Sauntering at an easy pace behind a Jew."

admirable. Will you believe me when I tell you that I bought this fit-out, which you see is only very slightly damaged, for eleven-and-six ?"

" You don't propose to wear it ? " I asked him.

" No," said Pym, " I don't propose to wear it. I propose to put it to much more valuable uses. Let me turn up the lamp a little. Now permit me to invite you to an inspection of the coat. Will it please you first of all to notice a latitudinal crease in the left sleeve ? Next may I draw your attention to the fact that at the wrist on the inner side there are many faint punctures — scores and hundreds of them ? Now let us look at the right breast of the waistcoat. Here again are many small punctures by the score and hundred. Do you make anything of that ? "

For a mere instant I made nothing of it, and I confessed as much.

Pym turned the left sleeve of the coat inside out, baring the gay-coloured silk lining.

" Yes," I said, " I see it now, or I think I see it. The coat has belonged to a man who has lost his left arm. The lining is worn and frayed for some eight or ten inches, and below that point is glossy new. The empty left sleeve has been habitually brought across to the right breast of the waistcoat, and has been pinned there, whenever the owner of the coat has worn it."

" That, I take it," said Pym, " is pretty obvious. Now look here. What do you make of this ? " He pointed to a deep grease smear on the right front of the coat. " Does that mean anything ? "

" It means," I answered, " that the coat is irretrievably spoiled for the wearing of the sort of man who ordered it."

Pym took the trousers in his hand and spread them flat upon the table.

" What do you make of this ? Look closely. Take this monocle, and have a good look at the legs below the knee."

I obeyed him, and saw plainly enough a number of small burnt holes, some as large as a pin's head, and others less in size.

" These," I said, " may have been produced by a shower of sparks. They look as if the wearer had been standing within incautious distance of the ' bloom ' under a steam-hammer."

" Yes," said Pym, " they have certainly that look. Now turn again to the waistcoat and to the sleeves of the coat. What do you find there ? "

" Mud," I answered, " dry mud."



" Do you make anything of it altogether now ? " Pym asked me again.

That air of irritating superiority piqued me a little—old friends as we were—and I answered rather snappishly that if he had a secret he was in it from the beginning, whilst I was not.

" Quite so," said Pym, " quite so," with an air of immediate allowance. " I know what I am looking for, and what I expect to find. You don't, and that makes all the difference."

He had not yet done with his examination of this suit of clothes, for he showed me where a parchment tab, which had obviously at one time been inscribed with the owner's name, had been excised by knife or scissors.

" Very naturally," he said, " the recent wearer would not care to have his name left upon discarded raiment which had been sold

to an old-clothes man ; but I presume it will be just as easy to find out the late owner's name as if he had still left it there."

" You want to find it ? " I asked.

" Yes," he answered, " and I have as good as found it, for the name and address of the firm of tailors who made the suit is stamped upon the buttons. I think I know the recent owner, and to-morrow in one way or another I shall be sure. It's possible I may have to make a dangerous journey to-morrow night, and if you don't mind sharing the fun I should like to have you with me."

I told him that I should very willingly be his companion, and for the time being we separated.

" I have had to lay a wide web to be sure of trapping my man this time," he told me, when we met upon the morrow, " but I think I have done it. Come with me to one extremity of the web, and work with me towards the centre. I think I shall find the late wearer of that suit of clothes in the middle of it. The search may occupy us for some hours, but we shall see."

On his invitation I dressed for out of doors, and we set off together at a good round pace. It was then about half-past two o'clock in the afternoon, and Pym headed for the Soho district, and on to Greek Street. There he walked in at the open door of a house, with the manner of a

man who has a right to enter at any moment, and passing a mere " good day " with a woman in an inner room, led the way upstairs.

There in a barely furnished front chamber sat a very ordinary looking man in dingy grey tweeds and highlows. The man was apparently wholly unoccupied, and was solacing his lonely leisure with a clay pipe and a jug of beer.

" Anything yet ? " Pym asked.

The man stood up to answer, and knuckled his forehead in salutation.

" Nothing yet, sir."

" Don't put your pipe down," said Pym. " I'll light my own. We may have a little time to wait here, Venables, though I hope not long."

" Walker tells me, sir," said the man, " as he's been there as near about three o'clock as need be every day for a week past."

Pym looked at his watch, and nodded. There was a gauze-wire blind behind the sole window of the dingy room, and at a sign from Pym the man took a seat near that, and, sucking lazily at his pipe, looked down upon the street. By-and-by he gave a little start.

" There he is, sir,"—he shot over the shoulder at Pym—" going in this minute."

" Good," said Pym, laconically, and looking across the narrow street, I saw a thick-set, bearded man, sun-burnt, and dressed in old serge, and wearing very much the look of a foreign sailor, in the act of entering the house opposite.

" You know the man you have to follow ? " Pym demanded, addressing his myrmidon.

" I haven't followed him yet, sir," the man answered ; " but I've had him pointed out to me, and I should know him again among a million."

" Very good," said Pym. " Don't lose sight of him ; and, whatever you do, don't give him an idea that he's being shadowed."

" Trust me, sir," said the man, and



"There he is, sir."

at Pym's call I followed him downstairs again.

In Soho Square we found a hansom, and were driven to Little Queen Street. Here again was a house with an open door, and here again Pym entered with the air of a man who had a right to a free passage. A second time he led me up a flight of stairs, and again in an upper room we found a listless loafer, who had a pint jug of beer before him and a black clay pipe in his mouth. This man wore a dirty apron, an ancient collarless Crimean shirt, and a suit of corduroys.

"And what," asked Pym, surveying him critically, "are you supposed to represent?"

"Why, sir," said the man, "I was told to get myself up like a workin' man."

"And can't you see," said Pym, "that that apron spoils the show? Take it off at once. Has anything happened?" he continued, as the man obeyed him.

"Nothing yet, sir. My instructions is, the chap arrives here pretty regular about half-past three—between that and twenty minutes past, sir."

"And, of course," said Pym, "the man who leaves the house goes out on foot?"

"So I understand, sir," the watcher answered.

"You know the man you have to follow?"

"Yes, sir, I've had him pointed out to me."

"Good," said Pym, and once more led me out of the house.

To shorten the story, we visited no fewer than five houses, and to reach one we travelled beyond the Roman Road. In each of them we found a man at watch, and in no case had the man employed been at watch in that particular house before.

"The criminal," Pym explained, "who has any reason to fear that he is being shadowed will very soon discover the fact when one man persistently dogs his steps. The chances of detection are very much minimised if five or six are employed. We are well in advance of our time, and since this is the only opportunity which may offer itself for an hour or two, I propose that we get something to eat."

We had come back to the neighbourhood of Oxford Street, and I happening to know of a small Italian restaurant hard by, we dropped in there, made our meal, drank a small bottle of Chianti, and took our cigars and coffee afterwards in tranquility. By this time the dusk was falling, and Pym invited me to rise once more.

"We are very near the centre of the web

now," he said, "and you will see in a little while who it is who lives in the middle of it."

We came to Great Coram Street, and there we paid the sixth visit of the afternoon. Here likewise a man was on watch. To him Pym said nothing. We sat in the fast-gathering dusk for perhaps half an hour, and at the expiration of that time a man came briskly along the street, paused at a house some twenty or thirty yards below us, and rapped at a door, using the knocker with some violence.

"That's him, sir," said the watcher. "I know his knock."

"Very well," said Pym, "you may go



"Well, Watson, what's the news?"

now," and the man with a mere "Good night, gentlemen," retired.

Two or three minutes later a modest rap sounded at the door of the house we sat in, and a visitor appeared. Pym at the moment at which the knock sounded struck a match and lit the gas.

"Well, Watson, what's the news?"

"The usual thing, sir," the man answered, producing a note-book. "Jones reports to Jackson Greek Street. Jackson reports to

Howth Little Queen Street. Howth reports to Samuels Great Russell Street. Samuels reports to Dunn Barbara Street, Barnsbury. Dunn reports to me, and that's the end of it."

"I suppose they're together now?" said Pym.

"I suppose so, sir," the man answered.

He was better dressed, and had an air of more alertness and intelligence than any of his comrades, and from Pym's next phrase I gathered that he was the captain of the band.

"I shall have no further need for your services just at present, Watson," he said, "but if you will send in your account to me tomorrow you can have a cheque, and it will be your business to pay the other fellows off."

"Very good, sir," said Watson, and he likewise withdrew.

"Now," said Pym, "in a very few minutes we shall be prepared to act. I have one other visitor to wait for."

We had not to wait long, for a sharp official-sounding rat-tat-tat sounded before the expiration of a minute at the door, and my old acquaintance, Mr. Inspector Prickett, entered, cool and suave, his silk hat shining like the helmet of Navarre, and his necktie displaying the tasteless ornament he always wore—the miniature copy of a five-pound note on an enamelled surface two inches at least in length.

"Well, Prickett," said Pym, rising to shake hands with him with an unusual geniality of manner, "have you anything to tell me?"

"Why no, sir," Prickett answered, "not just at present. Anything to tell me, sir?"

"Why yes," said Pym, with extreme dryness, "I think I have a good deal to tell you."

Prickett prided himself—and with excellent reason—upon the control he could exercise over his own facial aspect; but for a mere second his suave coolness seemed to leave him. "I am very much obliged for your kindness. It was a very thoughtful thing of you to send that poor woman to me."

"Well, sir," said Prickett, wagging his head blandly, and thoroughly on his guard again by this time. "I never said as it was

me as done it, but I don't mind admitting, sir, as you scored there. If it wasn't actually me, I knewed as well as possible who it was, and I was able to pass your little message on, sir."

"Thank you," said Pym, with perfect dryness; "and now I suppose, Prickett, you won't have any objection to visiting your friend Mr. Mathew Queenie Ryan in company with Mr. Venables and myself."

Prickett's quick eye shot sidelong at him, and his eyebrows lifted by a hair's-breadth.

"What name did you say, sir?"

"Mr. Mathew Queenie Ryan," Pym repeated. "In case," he added, twinkling,



"What name did you say, sir?"

"the gentleman's address is not known to you, I will tell you that he is at present within a stone's throw. He is a man of great intelligence; and I think that you would like to meet him."

Prickett drew a long breath, and then expelled the air from his lungs with extreme slowness.

"I don't say I shouldn't," he said. Then, with extreme quiet, "Perhaps, Mr. Pym, if you should have anything to say, I might like to be present when you say it."

"I'm very glad to hear that, Prickett," Pym cried, almost boisterously, slapping the Inspector on the shoulder as he spoke. "It's

you to-day, and me to-morrow; or you to-morrow, and me to-day. It's all the fortune of war, Prickett."

"Yes, sir," said Prickett, mildly; "it's the fortune of war, as you say, sir."

"There are two of them," said Pym, with sudden seriousness. "Do you think they're likely to ride rusty?"

"I should say not, sir," said Prickett, openly admitting the situation, as I could see quite easily—"not against three of us. I'd face a dozen of 'em myself alone. They're a poor lot from what I know about 'em."

"Come along, then," said Pym, and we all three went together.

We were at the house Pym sought for in half a minute, and Prickett knocked at the door.

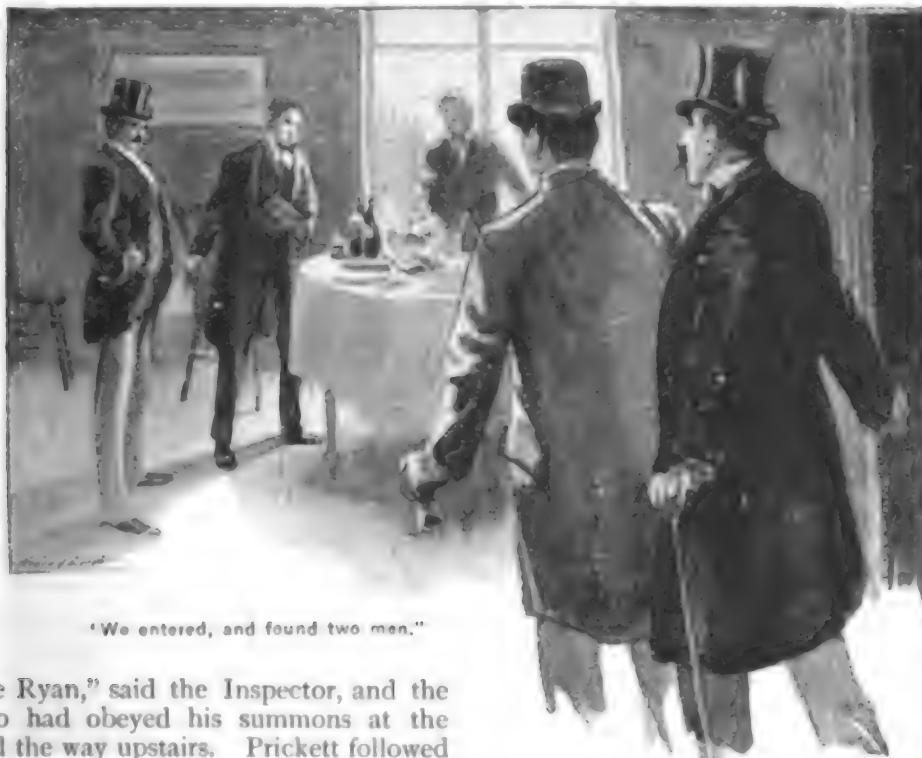
"Three gentlemen to see Mr. Mathew

Pym stretched forth a hand against me to warn me from entering the room. The girl had fulfilled her business, and had gone downstairs again.

"Ain't I," the indignant querist went on, "ain't I laid a plan to baffle the cutest hound they could put on the scent, an' ain't you givin' me clean away by bein' here? Our bargain was 'No direct communication,' and here I'm bein' sold. Sold? I'm given away, sir."

"You had better come in, gentlemen," said Prickett. His voice had a minatory tone, and seemed distinctly to convey a threat.

We entered, and found two men standing near a table on which a plentiful repast was spread. There were two or three different kinds of wine bottles on the table, and a



'We entered, and found two men.'

Queenie Ryan," said the Inspector, and the girl who had obeyed his summons at the door led the way upstairs. Prickett followed close upon her heels, and we followed close on Prickett, I bringing up the rear. The girl knocked, and we heard a voice unmistakably American in tone cry, "Come in."

Prickett brushed by the maid, and before either of us had followed him into the room, the same voice cried out in a tone of petulant irritation:

"Naow, what on airth do you mean by this? Ain't it bad enough for me to run the risks I dew without you comin' here and layin' me open to suspicion?"

china bowl full of fruit occupied the centre.

"This, Mr. Ryan," said Prickett, "is Mr. Pym—Mr. John Pym. You may have heard of him. The other gentleman is a friend of his and mine, who I believe takes an interest in dynamite."

The man addressed as Ryan turned pale at the mention of the word, and fairly staggered. He was a small man, with a shifty eye, a close-cropped head of hair of sandy texture, a clean-shaven upper lip, and a

pointed chin beard. The one thing that struck me in this aspect was that he had lost his left arm, and that the cuff of the empty sleeve was fastened to the right breast of his waistcoat.

He recovered himself with an evident effort, and Prickett went on :

"Mr. Pym has something to say to you, Mr. Ryan, and he chooses to say it in my presence."

"I would rather not say it here," said Pym. "Perhaps this gentleman will be good enough, Prickett, to accompany me to my rooms. Do you mind obliging me by getting a four-wheeler, Ned, or will you stay here with Prickett whilst I go for one ?"



"'Mr. Ryan,' said Pym, . . . 'thought the possession of this raiment dangerous.'"

He was out of the room before he had fairly finished speaking, and we heard him running downstairs at a great rate. Mr. Ryan and his guest resumed their seats. They made no attempt to renew their meal ; but with one consent each reached out a hand, poured out a tumblerful of wine, and emptied it.

"Naow," said Mr. Ryan, recovering a shaky courage, "what's this all abaout, Mr. Prickett?"

"I don't know," said Prickett collectedly, "no more'n the man in the moon. You and me, it seems, is going to be instructed at the same time."

Pym down below was making the street ring with shrill repetitions of a single call. In a while a four-wheeler lumbered to the door, and Pym came upstairs.

"Now, gentlemen, if you please."

The two came with us with obvious unwillingness, but they made no attempt at resistance or escape. Pym and Prickett marshalled them with great politeness into the interior of the vehicle, and followed them. I mounted by the driver, and gave the word for home.

We were there in a quarter of an hour ; and, having discharged the cabman, I opened the door by means of my latch-key and admitted the party.

Once in his own room, Pym turned up the gas, and there on the table, neatly laid out, was the suit of clothes which had been so lately submitted to me.

"Mr. Ryan," said Pym, standing like a professor who addresses his class, "thought the possession of this raiment dangerous. You

will notice that the front of the coat is smeared." He paused for a second or two, and fixed Mr. Ryan with his eye. "Smeared," he repeated, "with glycerine. If you will look carefully at the legs of the trousers you will find that they have been corroded by a very fine sprinkling of nitric acid. I say nitric acid with some certainty, though there are many other corrosive acids which would produce the same effect. You will see, Inspector, that all the garments are smeared with an earthy substance, now quite dry. I am able to tell you from close examination that that earthy substance is identical in character with the clay found in the house in Bethesda Street, Little Ethel Road, Battersea. This suit of clothes was made at the order of Mr. Ryan by a firm of tailors in Ayr Street, whose name you will find stamped upon the trouser buttons.

It was sent home on the 1st May last, and the messenger was paid in cash by Mr. Ryan. You will see further that the left cuff of the coat and the right breast of the waistcoat have been repeatedly pinned together, as in the case of the dress Mr. Ryan now wears."

"I don't say," said Mr. Ryan, "that the clothes ain't mine. I don't say that the clay an' the glycerine an' the nitric acid didn't spoil 'em. Haow in the name o' thunder does any man suppose I was goin' to handle them things and get no mark?"

"Well, you see," said Prickett, "you forgot to tell us as you had seen 'em. That's a

"Silas Hank," repeated Prickett; "known to the Yard, Mr. Pym. Go on, sir."

"Silas Hank," said Pym, "is the Head Centre of the Fenian Irreconcilables, and between him and Mr. Ryan I have traced a system of communication which has five joints in it. I think you will be able to confirm me, Prickett, in the statement that Mr. Ryan has chosen to adopt an equally circuitous communication with Scotland Yard?"

"That's so," said Prickett. He shook his head gloomily and reprovingly at Mr. Ryan. "You've been playing fast and loose, you have," he said. "You've been getting money



"Fell upon his knees."

point, you know, Mr. Ryan, that's a point. You shouldn't have forgot that now."

"It seemed so well worth while," Pym continued, "to get rid of this suit that Mr. Ryan gave the parcel in which it was wrapped up to Giachomo Persani, and sent him with it to Barbara Street, Barnsbury" (he named the number, which I suppress). "From Barbara Street to Great Russell Street the parcel was carried by John Fisher. From Great Russell Street to Little Queen Street it was borne by a man named Goldworthy—the Christian name so far is unknown to me. From Little Queen Street to Greek Street it was carried by James Sullivan, and by James Sullivan it was handed to the care of Silas Hank."

out of both sides, I'll be bound. Why," he cried, with a sudden illumination, "was it you who got the stuff placed there in Hank's pay, and then came and blew the gaff to us?"

"That's precisely the point I was arriving at," said Pym. "But first of all I want to clear up one point. This suit of clothes was sold to an elderly Hebrew under my eye in Greek Street on Monday last. I tracked that elderly Hebrew through his day's business, and when he reached his shop in Rag Fair I bought the clothes from him."

An execration broke from Ryan's lips.

"I sent him word to ship 'em to New York," he groaned.

"It was my first object," Pym went on—still very professorial in his manner—"to find out what communications Mr. Silas Hank was making with the outer world."

"We shadowed his man to Barbara Street," said Prickett, "and we have had the house watched. If this case," he added, "had been in my hands I would have tried to make a cleaner job of it."

"There's nothing criminal in all this," said Ryan, shaking as he spoke. "I own up. The stuff did come through my hands, but I never meant to make no use of it. It ain't no business o' mine to blow my fellow Christians out of the world. I did the square and honest thing, and I went and told the force."

"But unluckily," said Prickett, "you didn't tell the force quite as much as you knew; and perhaps that will be awkward for you. I must trouble you to come along with me, Mr. Ryan. I haven't been introduced to this gentleman yet, but perhaps he'll come as well."

"Great Scott," Ryan broke out, staring round him like a wild creature in a trap. "You ain't going to make a public matter of it, Mr. Prickett." He fell upon his knees, beseeching in an agony of terror, and calling upon the most sacred names to witness that his life was not worth a minute's purchase if

it were known that he had trifled with the Brotherhood. Prickett listened with a stony immobility, and when the whining wretch gave him a chance to speak, he said:

"You should have thought of this before."

Mr. Ryan and his companion were detained in custody. The former was compelled to give evidence in court, but Mr. Silas Hank, though sought for high and low, was nowhere to be found. How he got wind of his unfaithful confederate's arrest was never known; but he disappeared entirely for a year or two, and was only heard of vaguely as attempting to stir up disaffection amongst the Irish citizens of Canada. Ryan was permitted to leave England under an alias. Doubtless he changed his name often; but when news reached us of the death from a revolver bullet of a one-armed man near Kimberley, neither Pym nor I had much doubt that the John Fogherty who fell a victim to the revenge of the Fenian Brotherhood was the infamous scoundrel whom Pym so inveterately tracked down in London.

As for poor Michael Fahey, of course the case against him was instantly withdrawn by the police, and he and his wife were swallowed up and lost in the vast and ever-shifting crowd of the poorer workers of London.



THE INVESTIGATIONS OF JOHN PYM.

V.—The Case of Gilead Vanity.



AM preserving, as I have said already, nothing like a chronological record of Pym's adventures, but I am reminded by a recent encounter with my old friend Mr. Inspector Prickett, of Scotland Yard, of the circumstances under which that active and intelligent officer first met John Pym. The story of the affair of Gilead Vanity is old enough in the public mind by this time to be new again, and my own share in the matter at least has never been told until now. It affords a double moral. It enforces in the first place the venerable aphorism of Dr. Watts, that "Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do"; and in the second place it shows how the merest trifling impertinence of an unoccupied mind may lead to consequences of prodigious importance.

On a certain Saturday the newsboy who brought my daily paper made a blunder. He left the *Standard* in place of the *Daily News*. As a Conservative, I feel it my duty to take in a Liberal newspaper, so as to have the faults and failings of the other side kept in my mind's eye. This practice, I find, keeps the intelligence in a state of just equilibrium, and I could wish, for the avoidance of political fanaticism, that it were more general.

The parliamentary debates as reported that morning were very dull, and when I had skimmed the leaders, and had glanced at the foreign news, and at the records of the law courts, and had found all barren, I betook myself to the study of the advertisement columns of the front page. I found it easy to entangle an idle mind in the shipping, and I took passage to Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand, "with accommodation amidships, music and smoking rooms, electric light, and every comfort for a long voyage," in full accord with the printed announcement before me. I started for Egypt and for Zanzibar, for Bordeaux and the South of France, for the Gold Fields of South Africa and the River Plate, direct. All on a sudden

my eye rested on this series of dislocated vocables:—

A.K.—y ixgbb unfusj aek gj jxu ebt fbgsu ed mutduitgo. dek mybb vydt yj igvuij dej je vygb. lgdyjo.

The apparently meaningless lines stood under the head of "Personal" at the top of the second column. I had read Poe's 'Golden Beetle' in my boyhood, and I remembered the dictum of that admirable writer—No puzzle can be constructed by human ingenuity which human ingenuity cannot solve. I went into the matter with a light heart. I ordered the breakfast table to be cleared, and then, with the advertisement and pen and ink and paper before me, I set to work. I can laugh to think of it now, and the riddle, such as it is, poor thing, looks so babyish in its simplicity, that I can hardly understand how I failed to solve it, but the fact remains that I covered a page of foolscap with futile inky guesses, smeared a corrugated brow with ink marks, contracted a baddish headache, and realised—apart from the fact that I had wasted two worthless hours—exactly nothing.

This failure pricked interest. Somebody, who had the key to the puzzle, was reading this curious stuff, for it was absurd to suppose that anybody was paying for the publication of mere rubbish which was not even pronounceable. I ordered the *Standard* to be sent in regularly, and on Monday—the very next day of issue—I found this:—

gtt jme xkdthut gdt iynto edu lwpi das eapt.

I had another dig at it, with the first result repeated. Tuesday brought this:—

261—cd cdchert lgxit xu ndj kpajt ndjg axut.

I can't say that in my own opinion I was further away than ever from the chance of solution, though, as a matter of fact, I was, for the mystery, as I learned very soon, had thickened a little.

I cut out the three enigmatical advertisements, and pasted them in my commonplace book under the indexed head of "Adver-

tisements in Cypher." Pym was away in Paris; he had gone thither four months before with intent to stay a fortnight. I had heard of him from time to time, but I knew nothing of his employment or method of life there, until he turned up in a quite unexpected manner on the Wednesday.

"What is the last move?" I asked him. "What has kept you so long in Paris?"

"Oh," said Pym, dropping into a chair, and nursing one of his feet in both hands, "I've found a rather attractive bit of work there. I've come across a kind of Assyrian Pepys. You'd hardly believe that the art of writing in cypher was invented more than three thousand years ago.

It cost me six months' incessant work to find the key, but now I'm in the treasure chamber. I have evidence in my hands which would have hanged Altos, the prime minister of Shira the Magnanimous. It is of less practical value now than it might once have been, for it comes to light at a time when the world holds not one little scrap of any other record of the people concerned. It's interesting work, though—very interesting work."

He sat dangling his patent leather foot in both nervous hands, and looking at it with his head turned critically sideways.

"I have been engaged," I said, "in an investigation of the same sort. I don't suppose they're much in comparison with secret writing in Assyrian, but I can't make head or tail of them. Here they are—three cypher advertisements from the *Standard*."

He stretched out his hand idly towards the big ledger which lay upon the table, and I passed it over to him open at the page on which the cuttings were pasted. He glanced at them for a moment, and murmured, "Child's play!"

"You can read them?" I asked, with some faint touch of scepticism. He bent his great brows over the page for perhaps a couple of minutes before he answered.

"I shall expect you at the old place on Wednesday. You will find it safest not to

fail. Vanity.' That is the first advertisement. The next runs, 'Add two hundred and sixty-one.' Hillo! What's this? A complication! A cypher in a cypher. Add two hundred and sixty-one? Add two



"I had wasted two worthless hours."

hundred and sixty-one? Is that it? Let—me—see. Oh, yes! Very simple gentry indeed. 'What old place?' Now let us have a look at the third. Two hundred and sixty-one again. Wait a minute. M—m—m. 'No nonsense. Write if you value your life.' That's the lot. Very infantile indeed, but it's done by ignorant people. The man spells 'nonsense' with a c."

He pushed the book away, and rising, sauntered to the window, where he stood drumming with one hand on the glass before him and looking out into the street.

"I beg your pardon, Pym," I said rather diffidently, "and I hope you won't think I doubt you——"

"Why shouldn't I think that," he broke in, "when I know you do?" He laughed good-humouredly. "Did you ever see a common Foreign Office cypher card?" I answered with a shake of the head. "You have two discs of cardboard, one smaller than the other. On the edge of each the letters of the alphabet are printed. The two are fastened at the centre by a little brass paper holder, on which the smaller disc revolves. You desire to write a cypher letter in its simplest form. You place, let us say, the K of the smaller card under the A of the larger. That gives you K for A, L for B, M for C, and so on. Thus you construct a simple cypher which

anybody with a little care can read. But suppose that you really want a difficult cypher. You take two words of equal length —let us say Mesopotamian and Preposterous—which each contain twelve letters. Now if for your first word you use M under P, for your second word M under R, and so on until you have exhausted your changes, you have constructed a form of secret writing which is quite clear to anybody who has the key-words, but is very hard to unravel. You can complicate still further by making any number of seeming words a mere unmeaning jumble, or in fact in a thousand ways. But in this case," indicating my book by a wave of the hand, "the method adopted is the simplest known. If you will take the trouble to print the letters of the alphabet in pencil, I'll show you how to read the thing yourself."

I did as I was told, except that I used a quill pen instead of a pencil. I believe the observant wretch had actually been counting the strokes of my pen, for whilst he was standing with his back to me, and I was in

your inferior alphabet for the signs of the superior, and read the first advertisement."

"I make nothing of AK," I said, not a little pleased, I confess, to think I had discomfited him.

"That is the key," he answered. "A is under K. Follow the key I have given you."

I followed the key, ploddingly, letter by letter. Sure enough it came out as he had read it. "I shall expect you at the old place on Wednesday. You will find it safest not to fail. Vanity."

"Now the next," said Pym, rather like a schoolmaster, I thought. I should have been better satisfied than I was if I had found him wrong.

"Add two hundred and sixty-one," I read out laboriously, spelling letter by letter. But there the key went all to pieces.

"Quite so," he answered, when I told him that his method failed. "You have come to the one spot where a touch of ingenuity is needed. What do you make of the order to add two hundred and sixty-one?" I made nothing of it, and I was candid enough to say so. "Suppose you were told to add one only in place of two hundred and sixty-one, what would you do?"

"I suppose I should push the lower alphabet one letter forward."

"Quite so. Two hundred and sixty is ten times twenty-six, and there are twenty-six letters in the alphabet. Each of the ten changes leaves you where you started."

"Oh, I see!" said I, sapiently, and so set to work to find Pym quite right once more. I was a little angry at it. I would so much rather have proved him an impostor.

"This looks like rougery of some sort," I said, after



"He bent his great brows over the page."

the act of writing the final letter, he began to talk again.

"Now write under your first alphabet another beginning with Q. Now," he took me up again as I wrote the last letter, "use

a while. "There's a distinct threat of murder in the last message."

Pym said that might mean anything or nothing, and the subject dropped. I am a tolerably busy man as a rule, but it happened

curiously enough that night that I was without employment of any sort, and I must needs occupy myself by the construction of an advertisement in answer to the three slight enigmas which Pym had solved with such an easy promptitude. I had the key now, and found the business easy enough, though a trifle tedious.

This is how my message ran : "Vd ild qtiitg 261 Pbzr frira riravat sevgnl g j r a g l s b h e zbagnthr per-sfrag nfx spe wbua clz."

This being interpreted, reads : " Go two better. 261. Come seven evening Friday 24 Montague Crescent. Ask for John Pym."

I myself carried the advertisement to Shoe

Lane and gave it in, wondering what answer would arrive, if any, and inclined to think that I had set an excellent practical joke afoot. I took care to be in Pym's chambers at the hour indicated, and whilst we sat together the servant girl of the house came up with a message. A lady was at the door asking for Mr. Pym. She declined to give her name because she knew that Mr. Pym was already aware of her business. Pym looked at the girl in some amazement, and after a question or two descended, leaving me alone. If I could have chosen I would very much rather that the visitor had turned out not to be a lady, and I began to see confession and apology ahead, and to think that my share in the business was a trifle boylike and foolish. Whilst I waited in some discomfort, Pym came back again, ushering in a lady of a graceful figure, clad in deep mourning, and so heavily veiled that her features were quite invisible.

The lady raised her veil, and showed us a face of such grief and anguish as I have not often seen. She was darkly handsome, with black level brows, and an olive skin, but her hair was tumbled, and her eyes and cheeks were scalped with recent tears.

" You have not seen the evening papers ? " she began, and before there was time to give an answer she went on. " Then you do not know that at three o'clock this afternoon Gilead was murdered, and that half an hour



"There's a distinct threat of murder in the last passage."

later Therèse was arrested. But, sir, she is innocent. She has not the heart to hurt a fly. He wronged her shamefully, and if I had suffered at his hands as she did, I should have had revenge. I do not know how you were associated with Gilead, but—"

" Madame," Pym interjected, with outstretched hands.

" You know the man he was." The torrent of her speech was not to be arrested. She was blind with her own tears, which fell down her cheeks like rain. " Wicked, cruel, unscrupulous. A villain among villains. And yet to the very last she loved him. She confessed to me last night—only last night—that she could not shake him from her heart. But it is all my fault. It is I who am to blame. It was I who bought the pistol. It was I who put it in her hand, and bade her go and threaten him. Ah, ma pauvre Therèse ! Therèse ! Therèse ! Que feraie je ? "

If at that moment I had not caught her in my arms, she would have fallen. Pym snatched a chair and placed it for her. I seated her with little difficulty, but with my arm about her I felt that her sobs were



'Ushering in a lady . . . heavily veiled.'

actually explosive. They shook her from head to foot. She buried her face in her hands and wept without control or effort at control, and Pym and I looked at each other in a dreadful bewilderment. Here indeed was a pretty outcome for a practical joke.

On a sudden—in a second—as if I had been conscious of the working of his mind—I saw a purpose declare itself in my companion's face. But whilst the wretched lady still sat sobbing in her chair, the scared maid introduced a second visitor, a man scrupulously dressed and gloved, with a hat of the very newest fashion polished like a mirror, and the stiffest and whitest linen—a man with an air of astonishing aplomb and coolness, and yet in spite of all these things a man who was obviously not a gentleman.

"Ah, Prickett," said Pym, "you are the very man I should have wished for at this moment."

"That's very lucky," the newcomer answered, in a tone lightly tinged with sarcasm. "Because, you see, I'm here."

"Ah!" said Pym, gravely. "You read the advertisement, I suppose."

"They cyphered it out down at the Yard," said the new-comer, "and after what happened this afternoon they put me on to it. But you know as well as I do, Mr. Pym, you needn't say anything. You've admitted the advertisement."

"Exactly," said Pym. "The advertisement was mine. A mere piece of braggadocio nonsense, intended to show these people

what a farce their cypher was. It led this lady here, and I have surprised a dreadful story."

The lady rose to her feet and looked at Pym with a glance I shall not forget if I should live to be a hundred. Her tears had ceased, and her eyes blazed with resentment.

"Madame," said Pym, bending his head before her, "I have been guilty of a grave folly. If you will permit me to do so, I will



'She would have fallen.'

atone for it. If the lady who stands charged with this crime is innocent, I will prove her innocence."

"You?" she answered, with a voice and look of immeasurable scorn.

"I, madame," he answered, looking her full in the face.

They stood gazing at each other fixedly for half a minute.

"Very well," she said at last. "You owe me that."

"I owe you that," said Pym. "And I

selle Hortense Valerie, 32, Holmden Walk, Primrose Hill, N.W."

"Pardon me, madame," said Pym, "but before you go I wish to ask you a single question. How did you come to read that cyphered message which seems to have brought you here?"

"It was my invention," she responded. "My poor sister Therèse and I used to correspond in it when she was at school. Gilead learned it from her."

Mdlle. Valerie lowered her veil, and went



"'You?' she answered, with a voice and look of immeasurable scorn."

will pay my debt." He turned to the last arrival. "I presume there is no need to detain this lady. This gentleman, madame, is Mr. Inspector Prickett, of Scotland Yard. He will tell me all I wish to know. Kindly leave me your address. And believe me—I have not promised you in vain."

The lady drew out a purse, and from it extracted a card, which she laid upon the table. Inspector Prickett took it up, and after a mere glance laid it down again.

"That's all right," he said. "Mademoi-

away without a further word. The Inspector unbent over a cigar. He told us the story so far as it was known. The murdered man bore the name of Gilead Vanity. The woman accused of the crime was his wife. He had married her in the States. He had divorced her in the States after the wicked and wanton fashion in which it is still possible to obtain divorce in some parts of America. That, at least, was the prisoner's statement. She had found that he was in London, and confessed that she had bought

a pistol and had gone to threaten him. She had left the house—this was still the prisoner's statement—leaving the revolver on the table of the room in which she had conversed with her husband. A shot had been heard, and she had been seen to leave the house within a minute. The man had been found with a bullet wound through the head, and one chamber of the re-



"Mdlle. Valerie was called for the defence."

volver was discharged. The case, Mr. Prickett concluded, was as clear as day.

"And now, gentlemen," said the Inspector, "the best thing you can do is to come down to the Yard with me in a four-wheeler and make your explanation. That'll simplify matters and save trouble hereafter."

So said, so done. Our story was heard and accepted. My share in it made me feel small and foolish. Pym said nothing, but walked off absently, without even a good-night, and hailing a cab, got into it and disappeared. I saw no more of him for two days, but in the meantime I read in the daily papers the story of the Vanity murder case, and saw that Mrs. Vanity was committed to take her trial. Nothing of importance came out beyond the facts that Prickett had related except this—the bullet found in the wound matched with the calibre of the revolver left

upon the table. I thought the whole case looked ugly, and in spite of the protestations of her sister, I confess I believed the accused woman to be guilty. Mdlle. Valerie was called for the defence. She declared that she had purchased the revolver and the cartridges. The gunsmith who had sold the articles confirmed her, and the only result was that she was put into the dock beside her sister, and was remanded as a probable accessory before the fact.

Pym called on Sunday evening, whilst the church bells were ringing. He was very grave and quiet.

"I want a little assistance in this matter, Venables," he began. "You led me into an embarrassing position the other day, and I have thought you might care to extricate me from it, and turn it to your credit."

I assented warmly, and at his request I went with him downstairs and entered a hansom cab which waited at the door. We were driven to a shabby street in the Russell Square district—the street of the murder. We stopped before a

shabby house—the house of the murderer. Pym paid the driver, and admitted himself to the house by a latchkey. I followed in mute wonder. He led me upstairs into a dilapidated parlour, and silently pointed to a smeared stain on the carpet. I looked inquiry.

"That is where the man fell," he said. "I have taken these rooms," he went on, "and I am living here. I have something to show you." He drew out a pocket-book, and took from it a small parcel carefully folded in tissue paper. Unwrapping this, he showed me a piece of charred paper, scarcely an inch at either edge, and of triangular form. It was burned at the inner edge by fire, and was yellowed all over, as if with heat and smoke. "Look at it well, and tell me what it is." I answered, after a very brief examination, that it was a fragment of bank paper. He handed me a powerful monocle, and took from his pocket-book a five-pound note. "Examine them closely together," he said, "and you will find a difference. The charred

fragment is an imitation of bank paper. I have thirty-nine more such fragments, and I have this." He showed me another bit of smoked paper with irregular edges blackened with fire. "It is a forgery of the signature of the chief cashier of the Bank of England. Examine it closely by the side of the original." Whilst I obeyed him, he pointed out minute differences, and these, under the magnifying-glass, were plain and numerous enough to make the forgery look clumsy. "I found these," Pym went on, carefully replacing the tiny pieces in the paper from which he had taken them, "in the firegrate here. The murdered man, you saw by the reports, was a copper-plate engraver by trade. I have ascertained that he has done no work away from home for two years past. He worked at home when he worked at all, and always with the door locked. What does all that point to?"

"Forgery?"

"Clearly. He has burnt forty failures in that fireplace, but has not quite consumed them. Now look here. What is that?"

It was as execrable a little oil-painting as ever I beheld in my life, and I said so. It was in a heavy, battered old gilded frame, which showed the plaster of the moulding in a dozen places. Pym tapped the surface of the picture with a coin, and a metallic ring answered to the touch.

"Painted on copper, you observe." He took the picture from the hook on which it hung, and turned it round so that I could see the back of it. "I have torn away the paper backing," he explained. There was an engraving on the plate, but I looked for a moment without understanding. Then—though of course the engraving was reversed, and therefore difficult for a novice to read—I made out "Bank of England" and the word "Ten" in the familiar bank-note text. "We may consider that point settled," said Pym, quietly. "Now for the next. Come here."

There was a great clumsy corner cupboard built up in one corner of the room, painted a dirty drab. Pym threw the door open, and invited me to look inside.

"At one time," he said, "you will observe that this house and the next were in communication. I shall show you a communicating door on the ground floor, and another

upstairs, beside my bedroom. Five years ago I learn that the two houses were leased by the same person, and used as a boarding-house. The adjoining house is now vacant. Now follow me, and step carefully in my track." He pushed open a door I had not seen at the back of the cupboard, and showed an empty chamber beyond. "Be careful here," he cried. "You see that?" In the thick dust which covered the boarded floor there was a clear track of footprints, leading to a further door. This in turn led to a stone landing and a flight of stone steps. These had been scrupulously cleaned, as one could easily see, but the light dust which falls in neglected chambers had covered them so



"You see that?"

thickly that the track was as easily to be seen as if it had been stamped in clay. But one thing puzzled me. Plainly marked there, was the alternate print of a neat footstep in alternation with the stamp of what might have been the foot of a wine-glass. "Our friend the criminal is a wooden-legged man, you observe," said Pym. "On Friday last a

person of gentlemanly exterior, '*with a wooden leg*,' as Mr. Boffin says, called here, and had an interview with Mr. Vanity. He called about two hours before the fatal shot was fired, but was not seen to go out again. When the lady called, Mr. Vanity had his door locked as usual. Take care where you



"The man disarmed her."

walk. I can't have these marks obliterated. The landlady knows the gentleman with the wooden leg must have left before then, for when she showed the lady up Mr. Vanity was alone. Now come back again, and I will show you my last links." We got back to the semi-darkness of the cupboard, and here he struck a light. He held it above a little skimpy shelf of planed deal, and laid his finger on a mark of burning, an inch in length and a finger's width. "A cigar did that."

"Probably," I answered. "But how does that help you?"

"Let us see," he answered. He led the way back to the room of the murder, and there unlocking a cash-box, showed me the stump of a half-smoked cigar. "That lay on the spot I have just shown you," he explained. "I have found that Mr. Vanity was not a smoker. Now here is a cigar-case—a plain and common article enough—and on the inside of it is written in ink 'B. J.' Now if there should happen to be a man of gentlemanly exterior, '*with a wooden leg*,' who was once for seven years at Portland

under sentence for participation in a forgery on the Bank of England, if that gentleman called here on Friday last, if that gentleman was not seen to leave this house, if the cigar which made that burned mark on the shelf there corresponds with the cigars found in the case marked 'B. J.' in size and quality, if the gentleman '*with a wooden leg*' should own, amidst a thousand aliases, to the legal name of Benjamin Jackson—if, I say, all these things be true, will you oblige me by your reading of the case?"

"The men," I answered, "were confederates in forgery. The murdered man had executed a clumsy imitation of a Bank of England note. The other brought him a number of proof copies, and they were burned as inefficient. The wretched woman who lies under accusation of the murder came whilst the confederates were together to threaten her divorced husband for his ill-treatment of her, and probably to demand some reparation from him. The wooden-legged man hid in the cupboard, and laid down his cigar to listen, and forgot it."

Pym nodded, following me with a forefinger on a forefinger, and ticking off the events as I narrated them. "The woman made her feeble bluster with the revolver. The man disarmed her. When she went away she

left the weapon. The partner emerged, the two quarrelled, the crippled man took the weapon, and whether by accident or design shot the other, lay concealed till nightfall in the empty house, and then escaped."

"There is only one thing to be explained," said Pym, "and that I have from the accused woman. She did not leave the house until at least ten minutes after she parted from her husband. She sat in the hall crying, and was ashamed to venture into the streets. No one came near her, but she was seen to leave hurriedly, a few seconds after the shot was heard."

"You told me," I said, "that I could help you."

"Yes," he said, "you can help me, but I have sent for Mr. Prickett, and I would rather wait until he comes."

He found me a cigar, and we sat in that grim room smoking. The evening faded into twilight, and the twilight faded into dusk, before the echoes of the great detective's cab awoke the quiet of the street. Mr. Prickett came in, and Pym lit the lamp, and laid before

him all the evidence he had shown me already.

"Yes," said Mr. Prickett, when all was told and all was seen. "That looks all right, I fancy. I suppose Sir Benjy's seen nothing to take fright at? You haven't set him on the wing?"

"No," said Pym, but I queried—

"Sir Benjy?"

"That's the name he goes by," said Mr. Prickett; "Sir Benjy Dotandgo. Sir Benjy in recognition of his gentlemanly manners; Dot-and-go in allusion to the wooden leg. I'll just slip back, gentlemen, and get authority, for though I *could* act without it, I never like to unless it's compulsory. Will you be so good as to wait for me for some three-quarters of an hour? I know where to lime him within an hour or two."

We assented, and Mr. Prickett rolled away and came back again in due course. Meantime I had my instructions, and they were simple enough in all conscience.

We all three drove away again together, I riding bodkin in the cab, and at Mr. Prickett's order we were arrested outside a decent-looking public-house in Clerkenwell. At a word from the cabman, who alighted and entered the house, the landlord emerged.

"Sir Benjy inside there?" asked Mr. Prickett.

"Yes, sir."

"Show this gentleman into the club room."

I followed the landlord. A man with an eye glass, a big moustache, a glossy hat, and a frock coat with a geranium in the button-hole, was leaning against the mantelpiece of a long room in which some dozen people were smoking and drinking. The man in the eye-glass wore a wooden leg, and he was entertaining the company with a comic story. He finished, and everybody laughed except myself.

I advanced to him when the laugh was over with the cigar-case in my hand.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but do you

happen to be the gentleman who dropped this in a tramcar, last Friday?"

He looked at me and then at the cigar-case, unsuspiciously. He took it in his hand.

"Yes," he said, "that's mine," but a second later he started and stared across my shoulder, breathing hard upon a sudden.

"It was picked up in the empty house, Benjy," said Mr. Prickett, in a whisper, and the man changed colour horribly. "Don't make a fuss," said Mr. Prickett in the same guarded voice, "and don't say anything. Come quiet now."

He passed his hand through one of the dazed wretch's arms, and led him away unresisting. When we got into the street he passed both hands lightly and caressingly all over his prisoner's figure.

"Tottenham Court Road, John," he said to the cabman, and followed his charge into



"The man changed colour horribly."

the hansom. "Good-night, Mr. Pym," he said before he gave a further signal for the start. "I wish we had you at the Yard."

THE INVESTIGATIONS OF JOHN PYM.

VI.—The Mystery of the Patent Spur.



YM had shrunk from all publicity in connection with his cases, and the police were willing enough to accept the credit which attached to his discoveries. They willingly allowed him to efface himself, and it was a full half year after his first successful investigation before the Mystery of the Patent Spur brought him into the eye of the public. With that he sprang into fame at a single bound, and for a time his name was as familiar in the ears of English-speaking people as that of Gladstone or Bismarck. The story in itself is sufficiently striking and terrible, but it is related here less with an eye to its melodramatic force than to the methods of observation and of reasoning by which the truth was brought to light.

One night in the Christmas week Pym was unusually companionable and talkative. We were sitting by the fire in bright lamplight, when Pym's servant came with a knock to the door, and being told to enter, announced a visitor—Mr. Prickett, of Scotland Yard.

"Show Mr. Prickett in here," said Pym, and a minute later the eminent detective entered, carrying with him a touch of the icy night outside. "Well, Prickett? Draw a chair to the fire. What is it?"

"Well, sir," said the Inspector, with a certain air of reluctance which had in it something almost shamed-faced. "Not to go fooling about, Mr. Pym, I've got a nut to crack that's a lot too hard for *my* teeth, and that's all there is about it. I thought perhaps you might take an interest in it. There's a thousand pound reward offered. The case has been put into my hands, and a thousand pounds is a lot, sir, to a man in my position."

"The case of Mr. Caffery, I suppose?" said Pym.

"The case of Mr. Caffery," said the Inspector. "Mr. Gerald Caffery is outside in his carriage at this minute. The poor gentleman's just used-up with anxiety about the disappearance of his cousin. I told him I'd come about to the end of my tether, and I ventured to advise a consultation with you,

sir. He's here in the hope that you'll give it him."

"I shall be very happy to see Mr. Caffery," said Pym. "Ring the bell, Venables."

"I'll go down and fetch him, sir," said Mr. Prickett, who was on his feet already. At an assenting nod from Pym he withdrew, and very shortly came back again with a gentleman of extraordinary stature and proportions. He was full six feet six inches in height and of very massive build. He was of dark complexion and heavily moustached and bearded, but he was pale, and had a look of great pain and fatigue. He carried his left arm in a sling, and his left hand was cased in a huge fingerless glove of green oiled silk. Pym placed a chair for him, and gave him a cordial greeting.

"I have read of your cousin's case, Mr. Caffery," he said, "and if my advice can be of any service to you I shall be very happy indeed to give it."

"I am profoundly obliged to you, Mr. Pym," the visitor answered, in a voice which matched his frame, a tone extraordinarily full and resonant. "You know some of the details already."

"Yes," said Pym. "I think so. Mr. Prickett and yourself may correct any inaccuracy in my statement. Your cousin, Mr. George William Caffery, disappeared on the 21st of last month. He was engaged to be married to Miss Constance Noble, of Castle Grange, and was believed to be devoutly attached to that lady. She was believed to return his affection, and there was no apparent reason why he should not have been perfectly happy. Your cousin was—let us hope still—is—possessed of considerable wealth. The newspapers assess his fortune at something like fifteen thousand a year. He was young and enjoyed magnificent health. There is no ground for supposing that he had anything to fear or avoid. It is thought to be impossible that he could have left this country without being observed. It is one of your family habits, Mr. Caffery, to be of uncommon stature, and your cousin was about your own height and noticeable anywhere. For the

same reason it is believed that he cannot well be in hiding. The only known person who could have any possible interest in his death is — ”

“ Myself,” our visitor’s massive voice broke in. “ If George died before me, unmarried, I should inherit his estate ; if I died unmarried before him, he would inherit mine. The family property was equally divided between us.”

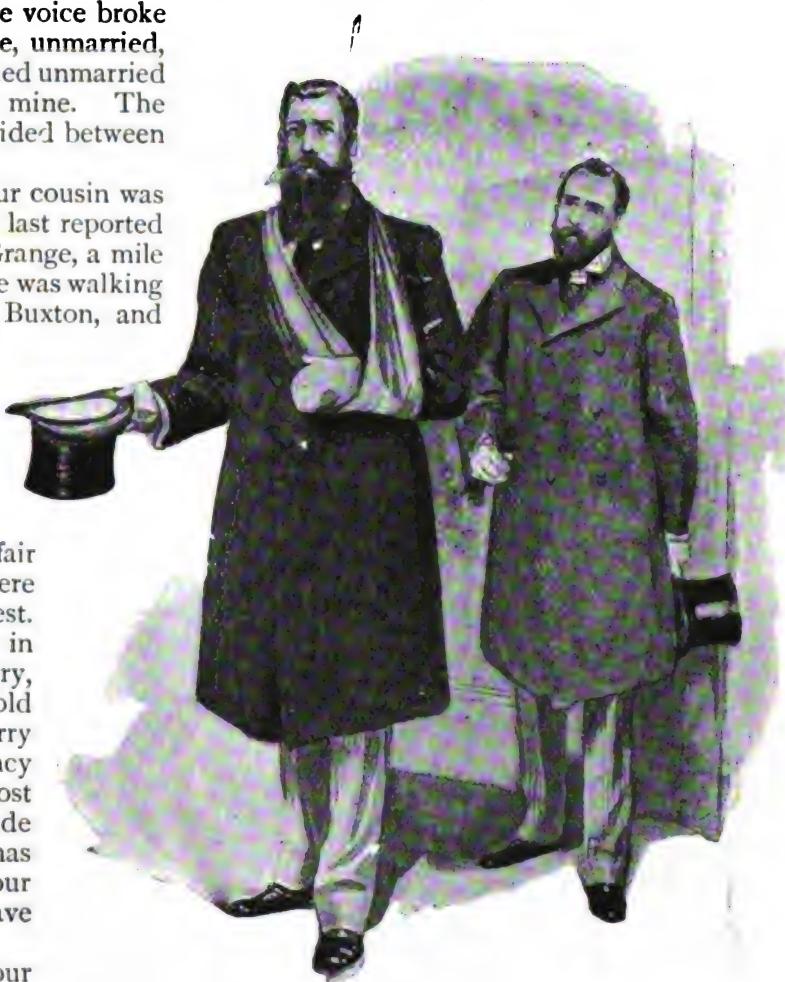
“ Exactly,” said Pym. “ Your cousin was last seen—or, to be precise, he is last reported as having been seen—at Castle Grange, a mile from Miss Noble’s residence. He was walking away from it in the direction of Buxton, and was observed to be in riding dress. The man who saw him was John Holt, Miss Noble’s gardener. There can be little doubt about the accuracy of his testimony, for he was familiar with your cousin, and passed him in a fair light within a hundred yards. There is but one matter of further interest. The missing man was walking in the direction of a disused quarry, and on the following day an old building standing near that quarry was fired by some unknown agency and burned to the ground. A most painstaking search has been made amongst the ruins, but nothing has been discovered there to give colour to a fear that Mr. Caffery may have perished in the fire.”

“ You seem, Mr. Pym,” said our visitor, “ to be in full possession of the facts.” He spoke in the groaning voice of a man in extremest pain, and his pale face went paler yet. He looked, huge and powerful as he was, as if he were about to swoon.

“ You’d better let me dress your hand again, sir,” said Prickett, speaking with respectful sympathy, but the sufferer, half-recovering, waved him away impatiently with a sweep of his right arm. “ Why not, sir ? ” Prickett urged. “ I didn’t hurt you last time, I hope. Mr. Caffery’s had the misfortune,” he explained, “ to scald his hand in one of them new-fangled bath Geysers. Now, sir,” he appealed to Mr. Caffery, “ I’ve got the cooling lotion in my pocket, sir, and I’m sure these gentlemen won’t mind.”

“ I am half a surgeon, sir,” said Pym ; “ allow me.” Mr. Caffery resisted faintly, but gave another ghastly groan, and surrendered. Pym, handling him with a practical dexterity,

drew the covering from the injured hand, revealing that member packed in cotton wool. He stripped this away with great gentleness, and taking a roll of clean cotton



“ He was full six feet six inches in height.”

wool and a bottle from Prickett’s outstretched hand, proceeded to dress the injuries, which to my unaccustomed sense were gruesome indeed to look at. The whole hand was one dreadful wound, and when the cold lotion first touched the surface of it, the patient moaned. “ A dreadful scald,” said Pym. “ You should rest entirely.”

“ How can I rest,” asked the sufferer, “ with this concern upon my mind ? ”

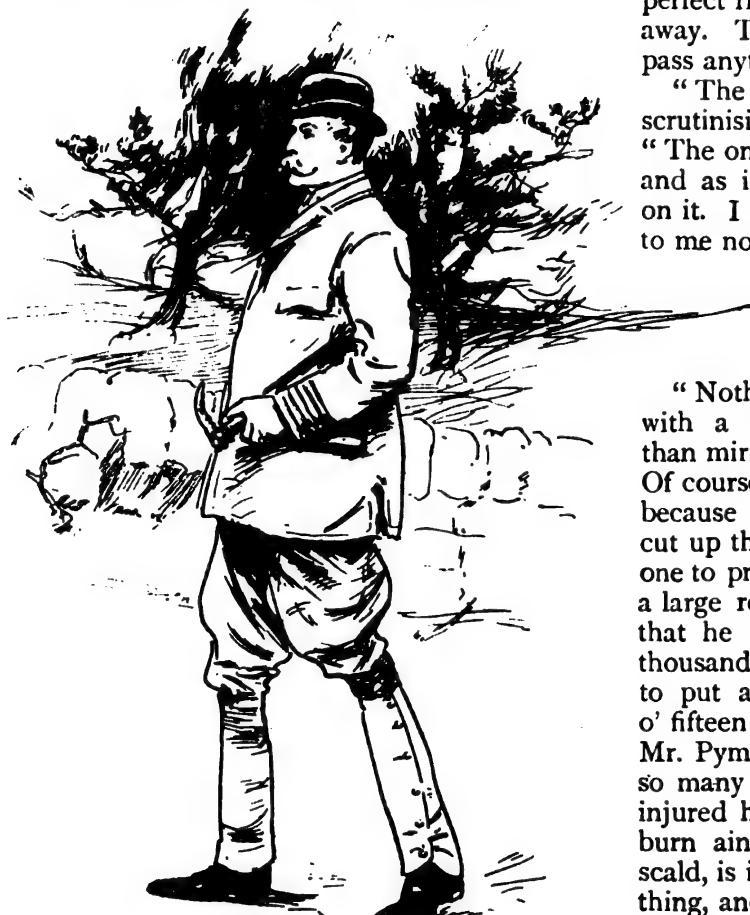
“ Leave the case to Mr. Prickett and myself,” said Pym, with a manner of some authority. “ Put yourself at once under the hands of a competent medical man, and give yourself absolute repose of body. Unless you obey me, you will lose that hand to a certainty—probably a limb—not improbably your life. The case is not one to play with.”

“ I believe you’re right,” said Mr. Caffery. “ I can do nothing to help the case forward

now, and if Mr. Prickett's belief in your acumen is justified, sir, I could scarcely leave it in abler hands. Money is not an object. But Prickett has instructions and full powers. With your permission, Mr. Pym, I will go away now, and will follow your advice."

He got up, the great tower of a man, quite shaken with bodily agony, and went slowly down the stair, accompanied by Pym and the Inspector, who, having seen him to his carriage, returned together.

"And now, Prickett," Pym began when they were both seated, "have you any theory?"



"Walking in the direction of a disused quarry."

"I've had a dozen," said Prickett, selecting a cigar and biting the end off it. "But they've all come to nothing. No financial trouble. No young woman in the case apart from the poor young gentleman's own sweetheart. No enemies. Nothing to bolt from. And besides that, he's bolted nowhere."

"There are unused workings and deserted quarries in Derbyshire."

"Explored 'em all for miles," said Prickett. "Dragged pools——" He stopped at this with a burning spill in his hand to light his cigar.

"You have examined the burned building?" Pym asked.

"Of course," said Prickett. "Put everything through a riddle. Found this." He searched in his waistcoat pocket and threw on to the table a small metallic object, which jingled as it fell.

Pym took his monocle from the chimney-piece, and scrutinised it as he spoke.

"Do you attach any importance to this?"

"I don't know how to," Prickett answered. "But you see it was the only thing in the whole heap that looked as if it hadn't got a perfect right to be there, and so I brought it away. That's my way, Mr. Pym—never to pass anything I can't explain."

"The only way," Pym answered, still scrutinising the little object in his palm. "The only way." He laid the thing down, and as if by accident left the monocle lying on it. I construed this into a tacit command to me not to meddle with it.

"You found nothing else that puzzled you there?" he asked in a voice of cheerful commonplace.

"Nothing else *there*," Prickett answered with a half laugh, which was more rueful than mirthful, "but the whole job's a corker. Of course I've looked at it all round. It isn't because a suffering relative is very much cut up that I take my eye off *him* if he's the one to profit by it. It isn't because he offers a large reward and makes himself very busy that he hoodwinks me. If I'd got fifteen thousand a year of my own I shouldn't want to put a cousin out o' the way for the sake o' fifteen thousand more. But then you see, Mr. Pym, I'm not everybody. So many men, so many minds, as the saying is. Now that injured hand, and that burned building. A burn ain't that different to look at from a scald, is it? But I've reckoned up for everything, and I'm fairly cornered."

"How was the hand injured?" Pym asked.

"Steam—sudden escape of steam. It's a patent contrivance," said Prickett. "I've looked at it myself. Housekeeper heard the governor yelling, ran up and found the bathroom full of steam, and him writhing on the floor. She shut the steam off and scalded her own fingers a bit."

"When was that?"

"Well," said Mr. Prickett, "it was the very day the house was burned, and about the same hour it was seen to be alight. A hundred and forty mile away. I was that fixed at first on Mr. Caffery—not such an ass as to be decided, you

know, sir, but resolved to fix him through. I made particular inquiries. The housekeeper, Mrs. Meeking, settled the thing in a minute. She'd a note from Mr. Caffery. 'Home at five to-morrow.' It was dated the twenty-first October. He got home the day she got the note."

"You don't make it seem too hopeful, Prickett," said Pym, laughing.

"Well, no, sir," said Prickett, demurely. "I don't think I've got a right to make it seem too hopeful."

"Look here, Prickett." Pym got up suddenly, and propped himself against the mantelpiece with his back to the fire and one slippers foot crossed over the other. "How long have you passed as a moderate and retiring man?"

"I've always had a modest sense of my own value, sir," said the Inspector, with a quiet twinkle. "I shouldn't have been where I am if I hadn't had that, Mr. Pym, now should I?"

"Now do you really want me to believe that you think I'm sharper than you are at the kind of work in which you have passed your lifetime?"

"Well," returned Mr. Prickett, with an infinite demure dryness, "I should say you was, sir."

"You humbug!" cried Pym, laughing again. "I beat you once by accident. You're a good fellow, Prickett, and a clever fellow, and you haven't an atom of spite in your nature. But you like a little harmless jocular revenge, when you can get it. Eh?"

"No professional likes to be beaten by an amateur, even by accident, Prickett."

"Well, no, sir."

"And so you bring me a case which has neither head nor tail to it, just to let me break my brains against it, and to prevent me from being cock-a-hoop about the one success? That's so, isn't it? Come now, Prickett. You're an honest fellow."

"Well, Mr. Pym," said Prickett, in no way abashed, "I wouldn't contradict *you* for the world."

"This is meant to show me what a duffer I am."

"Don't put it that way, Mr. Pym," said Prickett. "It's a tough job. That's all, sir." "It's a challenge, anyway?"

"Well, you may say that. And I don't quite say it's fair, and I don't say as I've a right to expect you to accept it, Mr. Pym."

"It's a challenge?" asked Pym, holding out his right hand to the Inspector. He was alive from head to foot. Inspector Prickett rose to his feet and accepted the proffered hand.

"It's a challenge," he said. "Do you take it?"

"Yes," said Pym, "I take it." He dropped the detective's hand and walked to his writ-



"Handling him with a practical dexterity."

ing table. There he sat down and wrote what seemed a single word. He dried the ink by waving the sheet to and fro in the air, and looked over his shoulder at Prickett meanwhile, as if he would read his very soul. Next he folded the paper and put it in an envelope, which he sealed carefully. "Now, Mr. Prickett," he said, rising and returning.

"Give me your word not to open that envelope until I ask for it." Prickett gave his word, and Pym handed the envelope to him. "Leave the matter in my hands."

I noticed then, as I had noticed before, and as I did many a time afterwards, a curious inflection in Pym's manner. Nobody, I think, would have said that he was boasting or swaggering, and yet merely to say that he

spoke like one who was confident in himself would be to say too little. There was a touch of arrogance about him, but it was so slightly expressed that few people found it offensive. They who had the least intellectual right to oppose it were, I found, invariably the men to be most wounded by it. Prickett smiled, but then Prickett himself was tolerably well fixed in his own self-opinion.

"In your hands, Mr. Pym," he answered genially. "Good evening, gentlemen."

He went away, knowing, serene and suave, and Pym, reseating himself, drew the lamp nearer to him and went back to the study of the small metallic object the detective had left behind.

"Should you care for a run down into Derbyshire to-morrow?" he asked. It was the thing I had been longing for, and I told him so. "Ah!" he said, "you have a very demonstrative way of thinking."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked him.

"You are impetuous," he answered, "and very young. You make it easy for one to guess your thoughts."

"But how?"

"My young friend," said Pym, "nobody can tell you how." He sat with



"I've always had a modest sense of my own value, sir!"

bent head, the monocle in one hand and the bit of metal in the other, and I began to question this new phase of him in my own mind. Was he not, with all his learning and

all his abilities, just the least little bit of a humbug? "It's natural enough in you to think so," he said, looking up suddenly with that radiant smile of his, "but I give you my word of honour that I am guilty of no pretence. Some people have a habit of radiating their own moods, and some people have a knack of receptivity. You are rather unusually strong in the one direction, and I am rather unusually receptive in the other. I'll tell you more about this another time, and find you a proof or two perhaps."

We parted shortly after this, and on the following morning we met by appointment at the railway station, and took train for Buxton. Pym carried with him a small satchel filled with books and papers, and with its contents he occupied himself completely—reading, comparing, and annotating all the way. As we approached our destination he put away his books and his notes in orderly fashion, and when the train pulled up at the platform he stepped out briskly and looked about him with an air of inquiry. A smart-looking groom stepped up to him, and saluting, inquired if he were Mr. Pym. Pym

answering "Yes," the smart-looking groom caught up his dressing-bag from the platform and carried it out of the station.

There stood a closed carriage with a highly respectable old coachman on the box. The groom opened the carriage door, and at a signal from Pym I took my seat. He followed. The groom closed the door, and mounted beside the coachman, and we were driven away.

"Mysterious! Eh?" said Pym, and then a moment later when my own mind had cleared, he added, "Quite right. Ample time."

I confess that I had been puzzled, at first, and that I had just thought that there had been ample time to communicate with anybody down here by the newspaper mail from London.

I smiled inwardly to think that I saw Pym's trick of reading one's thoughts.

"Simple as A B C," said Pym, laughing outright at my startled look.



"Dried the ink by waving the sheet to and fro."

We drove for an hour up hill and down dale through a country so beautiful that not even the desolation of winter could rob it of its sweetness. At last we came upon a pair of gates which led to a gravelled drive, and at the upper edge of a fine sweeping semi-circle drew to a standstill in front of an old-fashioned and substantial house. We were immediately ushered into a morning room, and there stood two ladies ready to receive us. One was elderly and silver-haired, the other young and handsome. They were strikingly alike in spite of the disparity of years, and the fact of a common grief and anxiety had stamped the same expression on the face of each, and had emphasised a natural resemblance.

"You are Mr. Pym?" said the elder lady.

"At your service, madame," he responded, bowing. "I have the honour to address Mrs. Noble?" The lady inclined her head. "As I told you in my letter of last night, Mr. Caffery called upon me and requested me to continue the inquiry which Mr. Inspector Prickett has relinquished. May I trouble you to ask one or two questions? Thank you. In the published description of the missing man I find it stated that he wore a locket with a chain of twisted silver of Indian

workmanship. Can you give me any closer description of that chain?"

The younger lady drew a locket from her bosom and held it out to him.

"The chains," she said, "were of the same pattern."

Pym took the locket from her hand and scrutinised the chain for a moment before returning it.

"Do you know of any other

chain like this?" he asked.

"My grandfather brought the two from India many years ago," the elder lady said, "and I have never seen another like them."

"Am I right," Pym asked, "in supposing



"A smart-looking groom stepped up."

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that the locket worn by Mr George Caffery contained a portrait of Miss Noble?"

"It has been found!" the young lady cried, clasping her hands together.

"No, Miss Noble," he answered, "it has not been found. I am simply in search of

have had some slight grounds for believing that there were other reasons which now weigh upon his mind."

Pym's eye was on Miss Noble's face, and I followed his gaze. She flushed and paled, but she answered with cold dignity.



"It has been found."

facts for my own guidance. I regret to say that Mr. Gerald Caffery seemed last night to have exhausted himself in the search for his cousin. I ventured to order him complete rest. It is to be regretted that he is disabled by accident at such a time, for I should have valued his co-operation. The injury is, of course, all the more severe for him because it happened to the left hand."

The elder lady, to whom this was addressed, assented a little coldly, I thought, as if in resentment of such a trifle being introduced at such a moment. I was intent on Pym, and wondered what he was driving at. That he had some definite goal in his own mind was certain, but what it was I could not even guess.

"Mr. Gerald Caffery's anxiety for the solution of this mystery is naturally increased," said Pym, "by the fact that he is the only person in the world who could benefit by his cousin's final disappearance. In the case of a man so wealthy as Mr. Gerald Caffery the mere monetary question seems absurd, but I

"I fail to see, Mr. Pym, what right you have to intrude upon those reasons."

"Believe me, Miss Noble," he answered, "I had my purpose. That is satisfied, and I intrude no further. Perhaps you might be able, madame, to lend me the services of a stable-boy or under-gardener for an hour or two?"

"Certainly, sir," said the elder lady, stiffly. Pym had not made a favourable impression, but he was as unmoved by that fact, and, apparently, as unconscious of it, as if he had been a thousand miles away. Some refreshment was proffered us with a frigid politeness, and was declined with seeming brusquerie.

Five minutes later we were out in the open fields with a brace of yokelish-looking fellows in front of us—one carrying a pick and shovel and the other a riddle. Pym began to talk about the geological formation of the country. It reminded him, he said, of some part of Scotland with which he was once familiar, and, in a more striking degree, of

parts of Cornwall. I ventured to break in on this irrelevance.

"You give me the idea," I said, "of having found out something."

"Three things," he answered curtly, and went back to his geology.

A quarter of an hour's walk brought us to a rough cart track, and in ten minutes more we stood beside an open disused quarry on the site of what had been a house of some sort. There were heaps of sifted earth lying about—heaps of rubble and ash, charred timbers, blackened brick, and what not of rubbish, and a foundation wall of brick on one side only was still discernible. Pym stood silently looking about him for a while, and then began to climb down into the quarry. The working had evidently been disused for many years, and was grass grown in places, and in others tangled with creeping plants.

"Bring that pick here," he shouted, and one of the men obeyed and dropped it down to him on a narrow level some twelve feet from the surface of the ground. He struck a blow or two and then sat down, handling fragments of soil and stone. He wiped one piece of stuff on his sleeve and set it in his

waistcoat pocket. Then he climbed back again, carrying the pick with him. "Either of you fellows know," he asked, "what this old building was used for?"

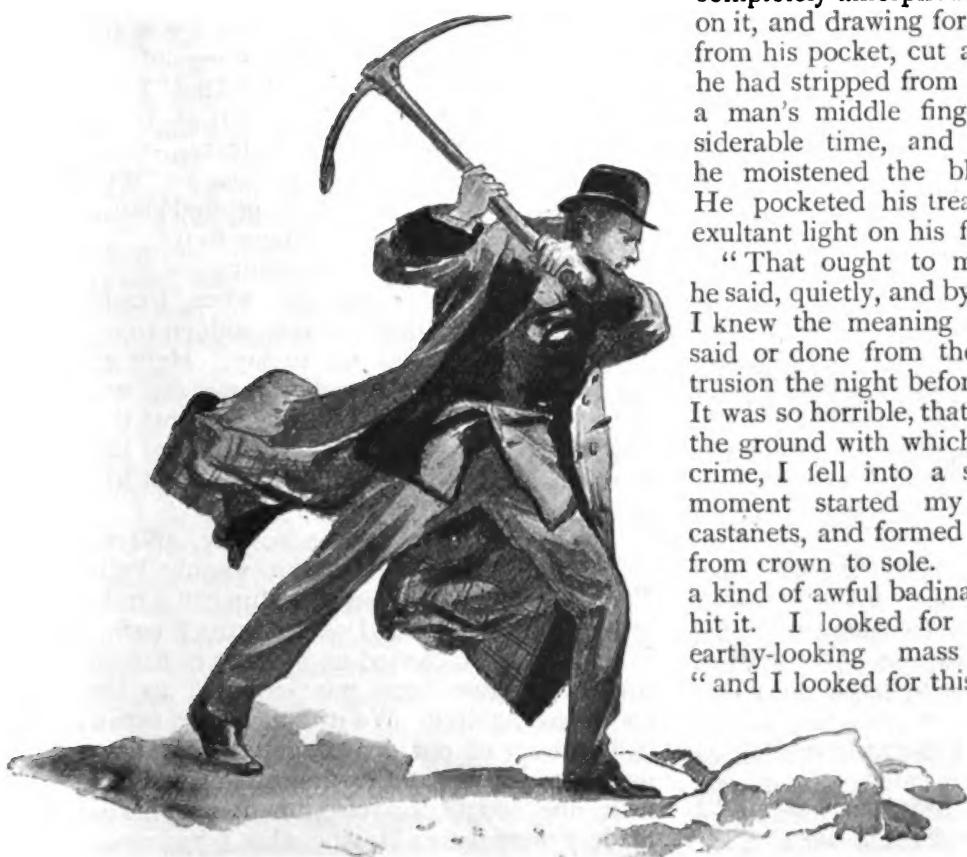
One said no, it was afore his time. He'd been there two 'ear an' never knowed as it was used at all. The other man was still newer. Pym stood with that astonishingly penetrating gaze of his, glowering slowly here and there, from under his bent brows, padding with one foot on the ground, and pulling with lean fingers at his lower jaw, whilst he rested his disengaged hand lightly on the haft of the pick. Suddenly he leaped forward, and struck a passionate blow at the ground before him. He tried to wrench the implement back again, and came near to falling on his face, it clung so hard.

"Here!" he cried. "That's what I wanted. Bring that shovel. Quick, man, quick! Help me to get this out."

The man with the spade ran to him, and in obedience to his orders carved the earth about the edge of the object into which Pym had driven the point of the pick so fiercely. Then the substance slowly yielded, and came out of its bed—a ragged earthy mass of completely amorphous shape. Pym sat down on it, and drawing forth a strong clasp knife from his pocket, cut away at this mass until he had stripped from it a piece of the size of a man's middle finger. This took a considerable time, and over and over again he moistened the blade with his tongue. He pocketed his treasure, and rose with an exultant light on his face.

"That ought to make it clear enough," he said, quietly, and by some dreadful instinct I knew the meaning of everything he had said or done from the hour of Prickett's intrusion the night before, and read his belief. It was so horrible, that, standing as I did upon the ground with which he associated such a crime, I fell into a shuddering which for a moment started my teeth like a set of castanets, and formed a goose skin over me from crown to sole. "Yes," said Pym, with a kind of awful badinage in his tone, "you've hit it. I looked for that," pointing to the earthy-looking mass he had unearthed, "and I looked for this. Here, boy! That's what you call blue-john hereabouts, isn't it?"

The lad addressed took the fragment of bluish rock Pym drew from his waistcoat



"Struck a passionate blow."



"A little fragment of glass."

pocket, and said that that was blue-john right enough, and lots of it about. The country was half made of it.

"Now," said Pym, taking back the glittering little object and pocketing it anew, "we'll go over that heap of earth again, lads." He threw off overcoat and undercoat, and stood shirt-sleeved in the bitter winter air. "Come along. Hand me that sieve. Now, gently! Half a shovel at a time, and spread it lightly!"

After half an hour of work, through which Pym surveyed every half shovelful with a look as keen as that with which, according to Tennyson, "the careful robin eyes the delver's toil," the man who was working with him paused and spoke.

"This has all been gone over afore, gaffer."

"That's not your business," said Pym. "I haven't gone over it, but I mean to."

"Swept up," said the man who wasn't working. "Swept up with a broom from

corner to corner o' the pläace! Swept up like a parlour, an' riddled through an' through."

"Did you find that, numbskull?" asked Pym, snatching up a fragment of glass less than a threepenny - piece. "Look at it, Venables."

A little fragment of glass, convex on one side, concave on the other—a part of a very small phial. On the convex side the letters still traceable, INE.

"The stupidity of man," said Pym, vehemently, "goes beyond comprehension. Do you see that?" he cried, pointing to the rubble heap which had been left at the first sifting of the earth. "That! That! That bit of bottle glass there. Can't you see? With L. L. printed plainly

still on the paper which adheres to it."

I stared and understood nothing.

"It stared me in the face when I came here," he said, with a resolved sudden quiet. "There, that will do for to-day. Help me on with my coat here, and tell me the way to the nearest railway station. Give me that fragment of glass, Venables. It's the last link in my chain. No," he added, "the last link but one."

He tipped the men handsomely, and we set out together through the waning light. There was a branch station within half a mile, and the rough cart road we had struck earlier in the afternoon carried us straight to it from what had once been the entrance to the abolished building. We caught a train within half an hour of our arrival, and having forty minutes to spare at the first station on the main line, sought the refreshment room, and made a meal there. Having what I had upon my mind, I was half ashamed to eat, but appetite conquered. The guard had taken our

tickets, and we were steaming slowly into the Terminus station before I spoke a word.

"Do you really think—?" I asked then, with a hand on my companion's arm.

"I know," he answered, "and so do you by this time. I shall clinch the thing tomorrow. Come in any time in the evening. I may want you."

The train slowed at the platform and then stood still. We alighted and said good night, and went our several ways. I passed a dreadful night. In the course of that night I was menaced for years by the raw inflamed left hand of Gerald Caffery, and when I awoke I was haggard and unrefreshed. I lingered about my rooms all day, but at five o'clock I received a telegraphic message. "Seven sharp. Here."

At seven to the minute I was at Pym's door, and when I entered Prickett was there before me, standing with his back to the fire, and smoothing his glossy hat on his coat-sleeve, suave, smooth and imperturbable as ever. Pym was seated at the centre table, with his student's lamp so near him that his face was in completest shadow.

"Now," said he, after a brief greeting, "we can get to business." Prickett's face dropped into shadow as at a wave from the amateurdetective's hand he took a chair. "When, the night before last, you called on me with Mr. Gerald Caffery," Pym began, "I had already taken an interest in the case, and had read all the newspapers had to tell me."

"So you showed us, sir," said Prickett, working away with his elbow at his glistening hat as if the welfare of his life depended on its state of polish, but doing it deliberately, as if he were merely assiduous in business. "So you showed us, sir, as I may say, from the jump."

"I had no clue, no idea of a clue," said Pym, leaning back in his chair and puffing quietly at his pipe, "until the proofs began to declare themselves before me."

"You have one now, sir?" asked Prickett, with an undertone of satire in his voice.

"You shall judge," said Pym. "I have today enjoyed an interview with Mr. Joseph Wright, of Holborn—a manufacturer of saddler's ironmongery for the trade. I learn from him that the late Mr. George William Caffery—"

"The late Mr. George William Caffery?" said Prickett.

"Was the inventor," Pym continued, without regard to the interruption, "of a patent spur—a box spur with a novel attachment of which you will find a sample on the table. I will ask you, to begin with, to compare that with the attenuated little fragment of nickel silver you brought to me two days ago."

"Well, sir?" said Prickett, handling the two objects together.

"I had, as you remember," Pym pursued, "an opportunity of observing Mr. Gerald Caffery's left hand. I noticed that it was scalded by the action of a biting acid. The aspect of the wounds alone would have convinced me of this, but the nails gave evidence not to be disputed. That of the middle



"Mr. Gerald Caffery is in love with Miss Constance Noble."

finger in particular was almost eaten away—an effect, I need not tell you, which could not have been produced by steam. Mr. Caffery's shirt cuff was fastened by a large solitaire of oxidized silver, on which a solitary splash of the same acid had fallen and had bitten deeply. Round Mr. Caffery's neck, worn beneath the shirt, but projecting for a moment as he sat under my hands,

was a chain of silver wire woven into a very remarkable oriental pattern. That also had taken an acid bath. You have observed, of course, that Mr. Caffery is left-handed?"

"No," said Prickett. "I can't say that I have, sir."

"When he was under my hands," said Pym, "he became conscious of the fact that the chain of which I have spoken was escaping beyond his collar. He made a motion to replace it—not with his uninjured right hand, but with that agonised left which I was dressing."

I recalled the gesture vividly.

"I arrived," Pym continued, "at two conclusions—that Mr. Caffery had a special reason of his own for desiring that chain to be unseen, and that he was by life-long habit left-handed. The fact that the hand, the solitaire, and the chain were all acid-eaten opened to view a theory which was in part confirmed when you placed that metal trifle in my hands. Any chemical expert will tell you that that piece of metal has been subjected to the influence of a powerful acid and of fire. Now," said Pym, rising, and bringing his face out of shadow into the upper ring of light thrown out by the lamp, "Mr. Gerald Caffery is in love with Miss Constance Noble. I need not tell you, since you have spent weeks with the man, that a passion in such a nature is likely to be of transcendent force. The chain he wears about his neck holds a locket which was the property of his cousin, and contains a portrait of Miss Noble. The attenuated spur you hold in your hand is an invention of the murdered man, and was never worn by any other person. Mr. George Caffery was in riding dress when last seen. Take this. It is a piece of gutta-percha cut from a melted and frizzled mass in the floor of the burned building. Look at this. It is a piece of common fluor-spar, of the variety locally known as blue-john. It is employed for the manufacture of ornamental trifles, and is used in the manufacture of fluorine or hydro-fluoric acid. Gutta-percha is one of the few substances which resist the action of that acid, and that acid of all acids is the one capable of producing the various effects I

have already dealt with. The disused quarry, beside the burned building, was worked for the spar, and the building itself was used for the manufacture of the acid."

"This is all very interesting in its way, sir," said Prickett, "and very curious." In spite of his *sang froid* I knew he knew.

"I daresay," Pym continued, "that you noticed this fragment of an old whiskey bottle. You missed this smaller shard, perhaps. It is part of a very small phial which once held salts of morphine. We have no more powerful sedative, and in whiskey salts of morphine are tasteless. What brought these two cousins in that lonely house together I do not guess. How the survivor escaped unobserved I have yet to find. But what happened is this. The man now dead was drugged, and in an unconscious state was set by his cousin in a gutta-percha bath. A gutta-percha carboy of hydrofluoric acid was poured upon him, and every trace of him but that"—pointing to the scarred remnant of the patent spur—"consumed. Whilst he lay in that hell-broth, his murderer saw the chain from which depended the portrait of the woman to secure whom he had committed this crime. He plunged his hand into the bath to secure it. In his after agony he clasped the scalded hand with his right. I daresay you noticed that his right palm was scarred?"

"Yes, sir," said Prickett; "I noticed that, but I made nothing of it."

"Now," said Pym, "open the envelope."

Prickett obeyed, and we read, CaF—HOSO₃.

"Take down volume four of Chambers's Encyclopædia, and turn to page 390," said Pym. Prickett obeyed once more. "Paragraph *fluorine*," said Pym.

"Yes, sir," said Prickett. He laid down the book a minute later. "I see."

As the world remembers, Mr. Gerald Caffery was never brought to the scaffold. The eagerness he had shown in his pretended search proved fatal to him. He died literally of his efforts to blind a track, which, but for his own fears, would never have been discovered. But he lived long enough for Pym to marshal his evidence against him; and at the last he made full confession.